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Artistic Play: Seeking the God of the Unexpected

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Seeking the God of the Unexpected

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B.A., Mills College, 1992

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
Person, Community, and Religious Life
2010

Abstract

Artistic Play: Seeking the God of the Unexpected
By Courtney T. Goto

Setting forth a practical theology of play through art, this dissertation investigates the question "How does artistic play allow people to seek the God of the Unexpected?" *Artistic play* is a term I use to place in conversation two partners (art and play) whose intersection has not been explored well, especially within practical theology and adult religious education. I define artistic play as the practice of exploration through art forms in which one opens oneself to unexpected transcendence, delight, or discovery.

In this intersection of art and play, I examine issues of body, imagination, teaching, and learning for adults in two case studies involving three types of artistic play (liturgical art, aesthetic pruning in a Japanese garden, and improvisational performance art). The cases shed light on artistic play as a lived practice that allows members of the community to indirectly seek and gain spiritual knowledge in ways that tend to be overlooked, namely through stories, imagination, creativity, and the senses. In the first case study, I discuss a Japanese American congregation in Sacramento, California (Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church) that is discovering connections between faith and culture through play, Japanese artifacts, and aesthetics. Through artistic play, the congregation is reflecting on what it means to be Japanese American Christian. In the second case, I explore how participants of InterPlay, a movement based in Oakland, California, are creating selves by engaging in improvisational theater, movement, and vocal music. Performance theory and object relations theory, especially the work of D.W. Winnicott, serve as analytic lenses.

While theological aesthetics has traditionally addressed art, perception, and revelation in the abstract, it has rarely explored how art contributes to practical theological construction *in situ*. This dissertation offers insight about local practical theological aesthetics and their implications for religious education.

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For Mom (Naomi Takahashi Goto),
my first teacher in artistic play

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC) in California and especially its former pastors, Rev. Gary Barbaree and Rev. Nobu Hanaoka, whose vision of the arts, Japanese culture, and theology has been an inspiration. I also feel deep appreciation for the InterPlay community in Oakland, California, especially Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, who have been tireless resources and supporters of this research.

Special thanks to members of my committee, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore, Dr. Don Saliers, Dr. Joyce Flueckiger, and Dr. Theodore (Ted) Brelsford, Jr., who helped me craft this dissertation with rigor and a playful spirit. I could not have completed this work without the care, encouragement, and patient feedback of my advisor, Ted.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Calls for the inclusion of the arts in religious education and/or practical theology excite me by their apparent recognition that art allows people to explore and theologize about divine mystery, which can never be fully expressed. Yet the ways this is carried out in reality is usually disappointing. Sometimes authors call for the arts in spiritual formation in the last pages of their work and/or fail to follow up with substantive discussion. Even if they recognize the value of the arts, most religious educators and practical theologians are ill-equipped to lead a phenomenological discussion about aesthetic experience, imagination, and the senses in spiritual formation or theological construction, much less teach engagement with the arts as spiritual practice.

The subject of play is even more ignored. While there is some interest in the arts, few in religious education and practical theology have discussed play or linked the arts with play in adult education. For scholars in religious education, play remains on the periphery, relegated to discussions of youth and children's ministry and omitted from discourse about adult education and clergy formation.[1] In the wider field of theology, dated work in theology of play exists, but I have found no evidence of progress toward a practical theological approach to play, and specifically play through art. In nearly all of the theological conversations about play, the topic of art is missing.[2] This study not only brings play to the center of theological reflection but adds to the discussion how artistic

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[1] This is probably due in part to higher education's aversion to play. While studying the theory of play is accepted as long as it is "serious" inquiry, having fun in the university classroom or in scholarly writing is often frowned upon.

[2] One exception is Jerome Berryman's *Godly Play*, which addresses art as pedagogy in religious education. But as I argue later, this text is limited to play with children in its examples.

expression and aesthetic experience can deepen spiritual knowing. To do this, I am proposing a new category called "artistic play," a term I use to place in conversation two partners (art and play) whose intersection has not been explored well, especially within practical theology and adult religious education.

Artistic play is the practice of exploration through art forms in which one opens oneself to unexpected transcendence, delight, or discovery.[3] The process of discovery might be a joyful experience, but it could also be a painful one that leads to greater understanding. While not all artistic play may be spiritually transformative, this dissertation focuses on artistic play that is potentially life-changing because of a surprise, sensual encounter with divine mystery that disturbs habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, and doing and allows people to construct new ways. Unexpected encounters with mystery occur in everyday life, for example, when people leave a concert feeling utterly moved by a sublime piece of music, having experienced some ineffable truth about God or human existence that they hungered for yet were surprised to find. While these moments are often experienced on an individual basis, this project explores artistic play as it is practiced in community. Two case studies, involving three types of artistic play (liturgical art, Japanese aesthetic pruning, and improvisational performance art), shed light on artistic play as a lived practice that allows members of the community to

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[3] My definition of artistic play is influenced by fieldwork with the founders of InterPlay, Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter. Cynthia writes, "To play is to do the things that we enjoy, that feed us, that we are compelled to do, that give us deep satisfaction, that lift our spirits, that are fun, that transport us, that are ephemeral, that lead to a sense of accomplishment, or that move us" (Winton-Henry 2004, 11). In my definition, I incorporate what Cynthia says implicitly about the internal goods of play, that is that play involves transcendence, delight, or discovery. The notion that play involves transcendence is also in Diane Ackerman's definition of deep play which is "1. A state of unselfconscious engagement with our surroundings. 2. An exalted zone of transcendence over time 3. A state of optimal creative capacity" (Ackerman 1999, dust cover). Though I draw on Cynthia's and Ackerman's understandings of play, I add to my definition of artistic play, exploration through artistic forms. This is essentially what InterPlay involves in practice, though it is not part of Cynthia's published definition of play. I suspect the term *artistic play* would be too limiting for InterPlay's purposes, which is attempting to have wide appeal.

indirectly seek and gain spiritual knowledge in ways that tend to be overlooked, namely through stories, imagination, creativity, and the senses.

Artistic play deserves scholarly attention because it is a spiritual practice that opens people to divine mystery and challenges prevalent epistemological assumptions. First, seeking and embracing the Unexpected (divine mystery) takes people to the growing edge of faith,[4] requiring courage and practice to play with habitual patterns rather than falling back on what is familiar, routine, or unexamined in thinking, feeling, and doing. Artistic play invites an encounter with the Unexpected, which might dislodge assumptions and disclose mysteries about the presence of God and human spirituality. Second, this study argues that artistic play challenges traditional approaches to religious education by suggesting a fuller epistemology. Rather than assuming that knowledge is universal and objective, this fuller epistemology takes seriously the body, imagination, subjectivity, and context and implies ways of spiritual knowing that include but are not limited to words and cognitive processes. Artistic play allows people to explore and interpret emerging ideas, emotions, and sensations that might have been difficult or impossible to access through discursive means.

Writing about artistic play allows me to articulate a spiritual path that began when I was a young person but to which I had given no name. As a high school student, I learned improvisational liturgical dance and clown ministry, which provided experiences more powerful than any Sunday school lesson. When those early teachers were no longer part of my education, I was left to make connections between art, play, and spirituality on my own, with neither the language nor conceptual tools to reflect on my experience.

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[4] In this dissertation, I capitalize the "Unexpected" to refer to divine mystery and distinguish it from ordinary, unexpected experiences.

Since then I have discovered that there has always been and continues to be a community of those who engage in artistic play, although people may have difficulty expressing how or why they experience God through it. At stake for me in this study is an issue of legitimacy—making visible with words what many people know by feel. Captured partially in words, artistic play can be owned, claimed, and placed in conversation with more accepted notions of religious education and practical theology.

What is Artistic Play?

My preliminary working definition of artistic play is that it is the practice of exploration through art forms in which one opens oneself to unexpected transcendence, delight, or discovery. As a subset of play, it shares the characteristics of play in general, yet it is something else. In both cases, play is voluntary and has a quality of freedom and often abandon about it. It is pursued for its own sake, and it takes place within certain limits of time and place, which allows a person to step into a world unto itself. Play has rules or structure, which allow play to continue. And it creates community from a mutual withdrawing from the rest of the world (Huizinga 1950, 7-13; Johnston 1983, 35, 40-41). Artistic play is all of these things, but at the same time more than play in that it emphasizes *poiesis* or the making of things, which is not true of all kinds of play. In responding to Socrates, Diotima says, “Any action which is the cause of something to emerge from nonexistence to existence is poesis [sic], thus all craft works are kinds of poesis, and their creators are all poets” (Plato 1976, 150). In the case of artistic play, what is brought into being may be art, like a performance or visual art, but artistic play

may bring about what is imaginatively constructed in an aesthetic encounter, sometimes a bodily awareness of what cannot easily be expressed in words.

More often than not, practical theology has recognized but not fully explored the role of *poiesis* in meaning-making, preferring to focus on *praxis* instead. For example, Bernard Lee's revision of Aristotle no longer gives pride of place to *episteme/theoria* (knowledge gained by objectivity) but to *phronesis/praxis* (informed, transformative action), with *techne/poiesis* playing a supporting role to it, along with *episteme/theoria* (1998, 14). While Lee recognizes *phronesis* as a creative, imaginative act, he gives a limited definition of *techne/poiesis*, which he understands as knowledge needed to make things like clothing, furnishings, and buildings (1998, 12). He does not address the making of things that are immeasurable, for example stories, nor does he recognize the possibility that making things can be a spiritual practice. In contrast, Elaine Graham takes a practical theological approach to representations of the "post/human" reflected in technology, film, TV, and works of literature.[5] Though she does not discuss her work in terms of *poiesis*, she focuses primarily on what people make (i.e., representations) to explore what they believe. This project is more in line with that of Graham.

Rather than using practical theology's Aristotelian approach to *poiesis* as a starting point for understanding artistic play, a more helpful understanding is that of David Miller, who argues that *poiesis* is one of the distinguishing marks of play. Because the noun *poiesis* comes from the Greek verb "to make" or "to do," he connects these in meaning. *Poeisis* "implies that every making is a doing; every doing a making. Creation is an action; every action is a creation. Both making and doing, creating and acting, are

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[5] Graham uses the designation "post/human" "to suggest a questioning both of the inevitability of a successor species and of there being any consensus surrounding the effects of technologies on the future of humanity" (2002, 11).

fabrications. They are the creative expressions of the self. Hence, one form of the Greek verb *prospoieomai* means 'to pretend,' that is, to make-believe...Play and *poiēsis* [sic] are the single expression of the freedom of the self to make and to do anything at all" (Miller 1973, 143). According to Miller, the world of *poiesis* is characterized not only by make-believe, but of acting or believing "as-if." Science, he argues, often asks people to conceive of reality in this way, for example, to think of a desk *as if* it were a world of whirling carbon molecules. Miller writes, "The suggestion here is that in order to be truly at home in the external world, in order to understand what we like to call 'reality,' we have to live poetically. Or as Martin Buber put it: we have to 'imagine the real'" (Miller 1973, 145). *Poiesis* is key not only to play as Miller argues, it is critical to artistic play since engaging art often invites people to enter a make-believe, play world and to live "as if" in order to perceive what is spiritually real.

Artistic play is easily confused with related terms. For example, one might ask, "Why use the term *artistic play* and not *art*? Art is play." The metaphor ART IS PLAY indicates that engaging art can be fun, [6] that art can transport the audience to another dimension, and that art (like play) is an end itself. However, there are many instances where art involves work. For example, musicians refine and master the basics of their art through disciplined hours of repetition and rehearsal. Paradoxically, this hard work makes it possible for the musician to play with what has become second nature, for example in the form of improvisation or in the expressiveness of the performance. Artistic play can also involve intense focus, effort, and seriousness but without requiring

[6] In this dissertation, I capitalize metaphors to distinguish them, a style commonly found in metaphor theory.

the player to approach it as work. An artistic player holds the engagement with art more lightly than a concert pianist preparing for a performance.

Creating art involves bringing into existence an outcome or a product that is judged by standards of excellence to qualify as art. Art is judged on its own merits and objective qualities, for example a painting's use of line, shape, or color. It is valued neither for how the creative process might have transformed the artist, nor for what the art inspires in the beholder despite its objective attributes.[7] In artistic play, the process is an end in itself, therefore open to anyone, including so called "non-artists." Excellence is not judged by others according to agreed upon standards, rather it is measured in terms of what artistic play reveals for the player. In fact, the "internal goods" (MacIntyre 1984, 187) of artistic play may only be fully known and experienced by the person playing. Because art stands on its own, art withstands critique, where as artistic play is destroyed by the internal or external critic, whose censorship cuts short the generativity of the practice. For example, in movement improvisation, the flow of artistic play is broken by the trip and fall of analysis, when the perfectionist mind begins to critique the performance. While both art and artistic play can be concerned with excellence, art is held up to standards, whereas artistic play is guided by rules that shape how play unfolds without determining the outcome. Because it is more concerned with process than product, artistic play tends to be more generous and more tolerant of art that falls short of "high art." As a student of dance, my performance need not be virtuoso for me to experience transcendence, delight, or discovery.

[7] Even when congregations are subject to mediocre preaching, some people take away surprising insights despite the performance, partly because the church encourages people to appreciate the spirit of what is being preached rather than to critique the sermon. Engaging the congregation in multiple artistic forms, liturgy itself can be a form of artistic play.

Artistic play tends to be more rooted in the real world than what Nicholas Wolterstorff calls the "institution of high art," where the majority of works are appreciated by a cultural elite (1980, 22). Typically this type of art is intended strictly for contemplation and is separated from life, often isolated in dedicated rooms and buildings (Wolterstorff 1980, 25). In contrast, artistic play involves "art in action" to use Wolterstorff's term, which assumes that art is a way of acting in the world. As it relates to spiritual formation, artistic play is a practice of exploring a person's inner world, the world around them, and the relationship to the divine.

One might also think that artistic play and aesthetic experience are interchangeable since aesthetic experience can often delight or lead to new insight, even spiritual knowledge, but a closer look reveals that aesthetic experience and artistic play are not the same. Artistic play is first and foremost a practice, not only an aesthetic experience. As a practice, artistic play involves aesthetic experience that generates the ideas, emotions, and sensations for a player to explore and interpret. According to Allasdair MacIntyre, "[A practice is] any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (1984, 187). Artistic play is an activity that helps people achieve a set of internal goods, in this case transcendence, delight, or discovery. Players choose to engage in the activity, agreeing to follow structures that ensure the continuation of play. In contrast, aesthetic experience may or may not be part of a

practice or in MacIntyre's words, "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity" (1984, 187). For example, one can have an aesthetic experience that is not only unbidden but not generated by human activity, like being caught in a storm. In artistic play, aesthetic experience is intentional in so far as people engage the practice for its internal goods.

Artistic play is based on the belief that humans are both playful and aesthetic by nature, a notion that draws on Johan Huizinga's and Edward Farley's respective work. Huizinga (1950) argues that play is basic to human experience by documenting play in its myriad forms, even in the form of war, law, and education. Farley argues that human beings are fundamentally aesthetic. In his view, the aesthetic is "bodily, emotional, immediate, and creative engagement with the presences and happenings of the world in their mysterious beauty" (2003, 162). Affirming the everyday sacred, the "presences" Farley refers to are surprisingly ordinary: a sudden rain, vistas, items in the household, a friend, or a lover. His point is that human beings are not simply machines taking in data, but are constantly engaging, responding to, and interpreting the everyday sacred through the senses and the emotions. I agree with Huizinga and Farley—play and aesthetic experience are intrinsic to being human.

Recognizing this connection (which may seem new), J.C. Friedrich von Schiller discusses "aesthetical play" in an essay written in 1910. His term comes closest to *artistic play*, at least in name. In later discussion, I build on his notion that aesthetical play involves imagination finding form, however I do not use Schiller's term for several reasons. He argues that it leads to beauty and harmony, which he sees as the highest moral good. However, like some contemporary scholars of theological aesthetics, I find

the emphasis on beauty as the ultimate object to be reductionistic. In addition, I leave aside Schiller's term because he uses it to make a philosophical argument that may not apply to lived practices, which he does not address.

Artistic play names something which cannot be aptly described by existing terms. Exploring the intersection of art, aesthetic experience, spiritual knowing, and play points to the notion of artistic play, whether or not it is named as such. Artistic play marks a location where multiple discourses overlap.

Research Question and Assumptions

My research question is: **How does artistic play allow people to seek the God of the Unexpected?** I began this research with certain assumptions:

- God is divine mystery. Seeking mystery allows people to know more about what it means to be human.
- Living according to habitual patterns that limit feelings, thoughts, or behavior is characteristic of the human situation.
- Being open to surprise is a healthy spiritual posture because it allows limiting patterns to be disturbed.
- Art and play, individually and together, have the power to surprise and challenge people.
- Spiritual growth does not depend solely on cognitive processes but can be powerfully shaped by aesthetic experience.
- The imagination, creativity, and the senses help people to perceive divine mystery.

Throughout this project, I have allowed the data and analysis of my case studies to challenge and refine my assumptions.

When I refer to the "Unexpected," the "Unexpected Holy," or "the God of the Unexpected," I mean divine mystery. These terms refer to the fact that God's ways are not human, and sometimes God reveals Godself in unpredictable ways. This is not to imply that what comes as a surprise is always holy, but it suggests that God's revelation is powerful because it can take people by surprise, as it turns upside down habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, and doing.[8] A significant implication of artistic play is that humans need not wait passively for God's revelation to dawn, but rather humans can actively seek God as mystery.[9]

An integral part of the Christian faith, divine mystery is beyond full comprehension yet is not completely beyond the grasp of the human imagination and the senses. As Paul writes, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (Corinthians 13:12, NRSV). In this passage, Paul argues that this world is only a dim reflection of God, yet some truth about the divine is knowable. Extending Paul's metaphor of veiled sight, Curtis Thompson writes, the notion of translucence "suggests the capability of the natural and human worlds to allow God's light to shine through, while that which shines through can be called *glory*" (Thompson 2004, 3). In their ability to mediate the world, the imagination, creativity, and the senses help people, in part, to perceive God's presence and other mysteries. Artistic play is based on the assumption

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[8] My understanding of the Unexpected Holy overlaps somewhat with Robert Neale, who writes, "The Holy might well be defined as the Surprising, and joyfully to anticipate and savor the Surprising is the playful response of the religious man [sic]" (1969, 166). However, Neale seems to anticipate only delight in encountering the Surprising, whereas this project accounts for a fuller experience of the Unexpected, including not only what is pleasant but what may be disturbing.

[9] Later I draw on Gordon Kaufman's concept of serendipitous creativity as divine mystery, which he discusses in *In Face of Mystery* (1993).

that exploration through art engages imagination, creativity, and the senses in ways than can lead to revelation.

There is an important paradox in my research question. If I ask, "How does artistic play allow people to seek the God of the Unexpected?" the problem that follows is "How do human beings deliberately search for what will catch them by surprise?"[10] Because the subjects of my research are taking an indirect, subjective approach to knowledge, I must reach beyond epistemological assumptions that are common in my field. Social science continues to dominate certain currents of religious education and practical theology, and is based on objectivist models of epistemology that offer little help in this study.[11] As Lorraine Code (1995) and Mark Johnson (1987) point out, the knower in such models separates herself from the object of inquiry, maintaining objectivity in the search for a universal truth. For example, in a laboratory experiment, the scientist tests a hypothesis based on a set of "objective" observations, and the validity of the experiment is in its ability to be replicated accurately. In this context, predictability is a sign of truth. While this approach divulges certain types of knowledge, it is unlikely to reveal insight about artistic play or the Unexpected.

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[10] In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates argues for an indirect approach to coming to know something. When a person is completely baffled by a problem, the learner is more open to a teacher's guiding questions, which help the person search for what he/she knows but cannot remember (Plato 2005, 109). Socrates argues that the soul has known such truth forever, and it is up to the learner to find out what it is, that is to remember it (Plato 2005, 112-3). The connection that Plato makes between learning and remembering points to the fact that soul truth cannot be given directly by another. For example, an other can help jog a person's memory, but it is up to the learner to remember. Similarly, in the case of artistic play, a person (or community) seeks revelation through an indirect path that is particular to that individual (or group), shaped by aesthetics, history, and context. Just as skilled questioning can help a learner come to know soul truth in Plato, artistic play is a process that can elicit perceptions of mystery.

[11] According to Gerben Heitink, the empirical-analytical current in practical theology is primarily focused on research and usually prefers the perspective of the observer over that of the participant. For example, H. D. Biastian has been a prominent voice in advocating for objective empirical studies. Others like him are influenced by the school of critical rationalism (Heitink 1999, 173).

Often in artistic play, there is no objective observer in that the player can never completely separate herself from the art she has created or made meaningful, which is an expression of her self. There is no replicating artistic play, especially when it involves improvisation, but more subtly because it involves an encounter with art that is tied to a particular moment, place, context, and people. In addition, making firm predictions about what will result from artistic play subverts the practice, which makes room for the Unexpected.[12] Finally, objectivist models tend to be biased toward cognitive, verbal ways of knowing. Though I could not write this dissertation without cognitive processes, learning how people seek the Unexpected through artistic play calls for a fuller epistemology.

My research question does not simply pose an epistemological challenge it presents a theological one. Christianity has a long respect for the Unexpected, which provides theological support for artistic play as spiritual practice. Christ was born in unlikely circumstances. He preached the reversal of social norms that brought down the powerful and raised up the marginalized. And his death and resurrection baffled even those closest to him. Modeling Christ, the "Holy fools" in the Eastern and Catholic churches at their height during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, emphasized a reversal of worldly values. According to John Saward, "Holy folly is but one manifestation of our baptismal non-conformity to the grown-up world in all its 'cleverness'. Holy folly is always, then, childlike and Christocentric, the revelation of that trusting sonship and childhood we have been given in and by Christ, the repudiation

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[12] As subjective and specific as artistic play is for the individual, when people engage artistic play in community, people's experiences are shaped by the art (among other factors as I discuss below). What results is an intersubjective knowing that is shared, transferrable, and perhaps replicable within a certain range of possibility. For example, the liturgical art installations discussed in this study produce similar transformative experiences, though not exactly the same for each person.

of the world's vainglorious knowledge and precocious wisdom" (Saward 1980, 10). The holy fools identified with the poor, preached holy ignorance, and disturbed tranquil times. Thus, the holy fools embraced and even exemplified the Unexpected, often giving saints the appearance of madness. For example, the Cistercians of the twelfth century were considered God's jesters, dedicated to preaching conversion to spiritual childhood, unlearning delusions of godless maturity, and practicing holy ignorance (becoming the idiot) and voluntary poverty (becoming the pauper) (Saward 1980, 63, 73-4). Much of the fool tradition was playful. For example, in the thirteenth century, Saint Francis of Assisi, whose joy was a full, enthusiastic mirth in Christ, called his disciples to be jongleurs of the world. The holy fool tradition is the closest the church has come to embracing play and the Unexpected in its practices.

While the church's tradition of welcoming the God of the Unexpected provides historic and theological support for artistic play, other parts of Christian tradition present a stumbling block. Historically, the church has shown ambivalence and sometimes contempt toward play, the body, and aesthetic experience, failing to recognize them as legitimate ways to seek divine mystery. According to Johnston (1983), play has been traditionally viewed with disdain because of the church's bias toward the value of work.[13] Epitomized in the Protestant work ethic but preceded by Augustine, this view holds the model person as hard working, frugal, self-reliant, and ambitious; and his or her work as the criteria by which to judge success. Play is considered time off from work, which is vulnerable to abuse (Johnston 1983, 85).

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[13] The church's suspicion of play may be linked to the demise of foolery in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions after the Middle Ages. Saward writes, "While medieval hagiographers delighted in the *hilaritas* of the saints, the English Puritans at the end of the sixteenth century regarded mirth as the product of human weakness and sin, a consequence of the Fall" (1980, 100-101).

In the case of aesthetic experience, at its worst Christian tradition has held a hostile view of sensuality, the body, and the fullness of art, and at best, an ambivalent view. For example, in the early church at the turn of the third century, Clement of Alexandria warned (women especially) against the use of perfume, silk, and dyed garments because they stirred lustful desires (Thiessen 2005, 49). His contemporary Tertullian argued further that the senses are the domain of the visible and corporeal, while the mind the province of the invisible and spiritual (Thiessen 2005, 55). This mind-body split that would be extended by Kant and others.[14] A contemporary example of this dichotomy, argues Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, is traditional, mainline Protestant church culture, which has engaged in "rabid, rationalistic suppression of embodiment," stripping liturgy of the sights, smells and tastes that would create a fuller experience of worship (Moltmann-Wendel 1995, 50). Such a history must also be considered along with the church's historic suspicion of the full expression of the arts, especially temporal arts such as dance and theater. According to Friedrich Schweitzer, the spontaneity and creativity of the arts have been too great a threat to the "objective" truth of the Christian message, therefore verbal communication in its less poetic forms has been favored more often (2001, 4). This project retrieves and builds upon Christian theology, tradition, and practices that embrace play, aesthetic experience, the body, and the Unexpected.

To ask "How does artistic play allow people to seek the God of the Unexpected" is not merely a phenomenological question oriented to the present, but also a future-how question.[15] An example of a future-how question is Fred Craddock's (2002) response to Kierkegaard, who compares the Christian to a man who is starving amid plenty. He

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[14] In the church's history, there are notable exceptions to his hostile view of the body, for example Julian of Norwich.

[15] I am indebted to Mary Elizabeth Moore, who introduced me to the notion of "future-how" questions.

becomes thinner by the day, not from lack of food, but because he ruins his digestion by eating all the time, out of season, and even when he is not hungry. So it is, says Kierkegaard, with the spiritual state of those who are always being fed but who have never had any appetite, which is prerequisite to good health. Recognizing this starvation amid plenty in congregations today, Craddock responds with some important questions regarding "how," including "How shall we communicate in an atmosphere where it is assumed the gospel has been heard and that now all that remains is supplying more units of information?" (2002, 26) He also asks, "How can we speak or write for those of whom Kierkegaard said they already know too much?" (Craddock 2002, 28) Craddock is asking the *how* of teaching and preaching, whereas this project enquires into the *how* of teaching, learning, and the construction of meaning.

Exploring how questions such as these involves imagining future implications of religious education and practical theology—playing with possibility. As Maxine Greene writes,

> [W]e can only know as situated beings. We see aspects of objects and people around us; we all live in the kind of incompleteness that Freire identified and there is always more for us to see.
>
> Once again, this is where imagination enters in, as the felt possibility of looking beyond the boundary where the backyard ends or the road narrows, diminishing out of sight…Consciousness, I suggest, is in part defined by the way it always reaches beyond itself toward a fullness and a completeness that can never be attained. (Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, (1995) 2000], 26)

In imagining what lies ahead of where the roads of religious education and practical theology narrow, there is play and possibility. According to practical theologian Bernard Lee, play is not only valuable for contemplation, it is essential to *phronesis*. He writes, "If, as Heidegger says, projection is about possibility, playfulness is a needed ingredient

for the entertainment of possibility. For possibility to be entertained, it needs to be entertaining!" (Lee 1998, 13) Lee boldly claims authority in playfully fashioning theory, not only through reflection but action. Playfully and artfully imagining future possibilities of religious education and practical theology, based on months of fieldwork, is exactly the intention of this dissertation. No other approach to this research question would be appropriate.

Case Studies

Though rarely made transparent, the reasons researchers study what they study are inextricably interwoven with who they are. My choice of case studies was guided by my spiritual and academic journey to explore, experience, and theorize artistic play. Discovering InterPlay five years ago, which I discuss as my second case study, was an irresistible entrée to my topic. Here was a community that invited me to dance, play, and do my research at the same time, which was about as much fun as I could imagine. As I engaged in preliminary ethnographic research for this project by practicing InterPlay, it was only natural for me to reflect on my earliest experiences of artistic play, which is how I chose my other case study, involving my family and the church where I spent my formative years. Personal connections with one's topic of research are never enough to make the research substantial or worthy of scholarly attention. However, these two case studies, which involve three types of artistic play, reveal more about artistic play than about my personal experience with either community. They point to how communities engage in artistic play for the sake of the Unexpected and what they make in the process.

Case 1: Artistic Play in a Japanese American Church and Family

The first case study explores artistic play at the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC) in Sacramento, California. While the church was a vital center of faith and community for Japanese immigrants at the turn of the nineteenth century, four and five generations later, SJUMC's sense of itself as a Japanese American church has eroded, a problem shared by many Japanese American congregations. The once bilingual sermon is now given solely in English. The once all-Japanese American membership is now multicultural due to the high rate of people marrying non-Japanese. Recently, members have discussed whether the church should drop the word *Japanese* from its name. Framing the crisis succinctly is the question: "How and why should the church retain the Japanese part of its identity?" This case reveals how members of the congregation explore the question of faith and culture through artistic play.

The first type of artistic play at SJUMC is Japanese American liturgical art. Naomi Takahashi Goto (my mother) uses Japanese aesthetics and artifacts to engage the congregation in reflecting on what it means to be Japanese American Christians. Through liturgical art, she provides rare opportunities for Japanese Americans to play with dual identities and new God-images that speak to their cultural experience, which is important because Japanese Americans are a liminal people, as are other Asian Americans (Matsuoka 1995). On one hand, Japanese Americans are born in America; therefore, we are not Japanese. Yet on the other hand, historically we have been made to feel that we are not American enough. As a Japanese American, I grew up learning to negotiate these tensions with the help of my parents, especially my mother.

Mom was a stay-at-home mother of two in Sacramento, California, where she continues to live with my father, Leo Goto.[16] Unlike most Japanese Americans, Mom, who is second generation, is skilled in multiple forms of Japanese crafts, textiles, and flower arrangement. She has taught these traditions to countless children and adults of Japanese descent, including me, as a way of introducing them to their heritage. For Mom, it is only natural to incorporate Japanese aesthetics in the liturgical art that she creates or procures for SJUMC, where my parents have been lay members for forty years. Although she has no formal training in art, theology, or education, Mom's gift as a teacher is to use artistic play to engage the congregation in theological questions that relate to cultural identity. Although she does not think consciously about it, Mom has a practical knowledge developed through years of trial and error as a mother, artist, and teacher. Like most expert practitioners, she senses what will or will not work. She leaves theorizing about it to me.

The second type of artistic play at SJUMC involves the revitalization of the church's Issei Garden, which is a living memorial to the first generation of Japanese pioneers who founded the church. A group of volunteers, the Garden Angels, are learning to care for the garden by pruning the trees and bushes by hand, using pain-staking, traditional techniques that *bonsai* hobbyists use. In this garden, which I argue is a territory of play, people are pruning toward an imagined legacy and future, constructing visual culture that expresses what it is to be Japanese American. The Garden Angels are playing with memory, spirituality, and cultural identity in the practice, though none of

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[16] In this dissertation, I refer to my mother as "Mom" for several reasons. Referring to her as "Goto" would be too clinical and objectivist given the intimacy of our relationship, and calling her "Naomi" would be disrespectful in my culture. She also refers to herself as "Mom," seeing herself not only as my mom but a mother to others. I realize calling her "Mom" may seem unprofessional, but it acknowledges my location in relation to her and supports the reclaiming of women's domestic knowledge and experience.

them would call themselves "artists" or describe what they do as "play" or "spiritual practice."

Case 2: InterPlay

The second case study is InterPlay, headquartered in Oakland, California. Trusting in the healing power of art, humor, and fun to transform lives, the founders of InterPlay, Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry, have taught InterPlay to groups in the United States and around the world since 1989, resulting in fifty communities practicing InterPlay in religious institutions, community groups, health care settings, and detention centers. Teaching people improvisational techniques of dance, theater, and vocal music, InterPlay invites participants to "play" through these artistic forms. This practice provides forms, space, and skills for participants to create art from the "stuff" of their lives, which can emerge in unexpected ways. According to Phil and Cynthia, because people are not fully aware of the workings of the inner life, expressing it in artistic form brings it out into the open, so that a person can see and play with it (Porter 2008).[17]

I proceed by way of narrative to illustrate what InterPlay is. Debra, one of the first InterPlayers before the practice had a name, told me:

> [At Phil and Cynthia's very first workshop, Cynthia] gave me a shoe, and she gave me the word *birthright*. I performed a piece lovingly with this shoe that had to do with birthright…I held it like a baby…as if it was a living being having been birthed….And there wasn't speaking involved...But I remember having a real sense of heart opening and the concept of birthright and maybe, even a desire in myself to claim my own birthright became evident to me in the process of making that piece.

[17] In this dissertation, I refer to Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry by their first names to make transparent my relationship to them, which is one of mentorship and friendship. Acknowledging my subjectivity is part of my approach, and it is also critical to the case I am making about the nature of knowing.

> …[I]n the context of creative work, something about the material or the idea that you're working on...connects to our own information and it expands the picture or touches on it in a way that we then begin to work with both the idea and our own information, which helps us understand the bigger picture. And I think that's part of our spiritual journey. I think that's what keeps me interested in creating in general--…that whole idea of creating meaning and finding new meaning in old things and new. It's all about making meaningful connections that can touch us deeply… [allowing us to] wonder about things—wonder and wander about the interior landscape (Debra 2008).

In recounting this story, Debra was surprised at how potent her memories are of pieces like this, created and performed only one time twenty years ago; this attests to how powerful InterPlay can be for people. She articulated how making performance art allows her to explore her "interior landscape." The solo dance that Debra described is by no means the only form that is practiced in InterPlay, but one of many forms performed solo or in groups with the support of a group process.

As a spiritual practice, InterPlay stands in stark contrast to, for example, the wordy, preachy approach and of traditional, mainline Protestant worship. According to Cynthia, InterPlayers do not perceive the practice as an alternative to religion (Winton-Henry 2008), though a few interviewees say InterPlay is "their church" or the closest thing to it. She said that InterPlay is "giving access to more ways of communicating, a more participatory relationship to ritual and to creating together." She observed that in certain contexts, "it seems like you have had to give up a lot of community, and in some you have to give up a lot of individual expression." Certainly the "high church" liturgical tradition tends to fall in the latter category, making little room for creative individuality. However, Cynthia argued, "There's some kind of balance that we're getting in InterPlay between individual expression and community (Winton-Henry 2005)."

Phil and Cynthia's hope is not to change institutions and systemic beliefs directly but from the inside. Cynthia envisions that those who have received leadership training (over 600 people in fifty cities on five continents and growing) will do or continue to do remarkable things in their own communities. The "grace and fullness" with which InterPlay leaders live will bring attention to the practice, generating a cultural confirmation of "bodywisdom" and realization "that it makes a difference to be [in your body] and how you are in your body in community (Winton-Henry 2008)."

Why These Case Studies

SJUMC and InterPlay make fruitful partners in a creative conversation about artistic play, in part because each community is so different. Each has its particular aesthetics—with SJUMC leaning toward visual arts, InterPlay the performing arts. Each has its own approach to theology—with SJUMC located in Christian tradition, and InterPlay outside of a religious tradition. One is mostly a Japanese American community, the other mostly European American. To explore how both communities are engaging in artistic play in diverse contexts will illumine how people in general seek the God of the Unexpected through artistic play but do not name the search as such. Although this project involves only two case studies, the comparison and contrast produce valuable insight about artistic play, opening the door to further research with communities that add more diverse perspectives to the conversation.

Though rooted in different contexts, both communities are teaching artistic skills to ordinary people outside of an art class, which is a countercultural pedagogy. In neither case do they claim that they are transforming people into artists, presumably because it

would scare away most people or because common notions of what an artist is are too narrowly defined. People tend to believe that only the elite, the highly trained, and the naturally gifted can be considered artists, and artistic skills are properly learned in an art class taught by artists. However, artists and ordinary people may not be so different. According to Edward Farley, "[W]e share certain sensibilities with the artists. We, too, have antennae that quiver with wonder, interest, perplexity and sometimes even astonishment and awe…that the world can be as amazing as it is" (Farley 2003, 166). He goes on to suggest that this sensibility turns people toward works of art and prepares them to look, read, and interpret them (Farley 2003, 166). In all three types of artistic play addressed in this dissertation (liturgical art, Japanese aesthetic pruning, and improvisational performance art), ordinary people are learning to be artistic players, people who can explore ideas, emotions, and sensations through art, and in these cases they are doing so for the sake of spiritual knowing.[18]

SJUMC and InterPlay are training people in what Howard Gardner calls "artistic intelligence," something most school systems tend to neglect.[19] Gardner is known for his seminal work on multiple intelligences, a theory that posits the existence of seven intelligences—linguistic (like poets have), logical-mathematical (like scientists have), musical (composers), spatial (architects), bodily kinesthetic (athletes), interpersonal (salespeople) and intrapersonal intelligence (like a person reflecting in a notebook) (1990, 19-20). These last two intelligences respectively refer to understanding other people or understanding oneself. Though artistic intelligence is not one of Gardner's seven nor does

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[18] Of course, artists are artistic players themselves. My point is that one need not be an artist to be an artistic player.

[19] As Gardner suggests, formal education in this country heavily promotes linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, rather than musical, spatial, or bodily-kinesthetic intelligences, let alone artistic intelligence (Gardner 1990, 19-20).

he believe that any intelligence is inherently artistic, he argues that intelligences can be put to artistic use, which demands creativity and other forms of artistic intelligence (1990, 20). It appears that artistic intelligence can be linked to all seven. Artistic intelligence applied to practical theological construction is what Daniël Louw (2001) calls "aesthetic reasoning," which I discuss later. Aesthetic reasoning allows people to construct meaning, including God-images, through metaphors and images—the building blocks of art.

Exploring the *poiesis* of each community's artistic play reveals much about the role of art and play in spiritual formation and the involvement of divine mystery in that process. A community's artistic play reveals who they believe themselves to be, who or what they understand God to be, and what future they envision.

Some Guiding Questions

To explore my main research question, "How does artistic play allow people to seek the God of the Unexpected?" I approached fieldwork with questions that fall into three major categories: (1) epistemology, (2) aesthetics and teaching, and (3) practical theology.

Epistemology - Artistic play calls for a fuller epistemology based on an investigation of several key questions: What does artistic play enable participants to learn or discover? How is spiritual knowing informed by imagination and the senses? How do bodies engaged in artistic play know spiritual truth? How does embodied knowledge re-shape thinking about what is considered to be spiritual knowledge?

Aesthetics and Teaching - Artistic play as a path toward the Unexpected poses critical questions about aesthetics and teaching: How does artistic play constitute spiritual formation? What skills and habits are developed? How does artistic play challenge habitual patterns that limit people's thoughts, feelings, or behavior? Why are imagination and the senses important to teaching and learning? How does artistic play hone the faculties of imagination and the senses? Why is surprise in aesthetic experience pedagogically valuable and how does it relate to spiritual knowing? How does artistic play challenge assumptions about teaching and learning?

Practical Theology - A third set of questions explores how artistic play allows individuals and communities to make meaning: How is aesthetic reasoning involved in theological construction? How does artistic play allow people to understand or experience divine mystery? How does artistic play allow people to participate in revelation?

Before I delve into these questions and the case studies, in the next chapter I discuss the method used in this dissertation, including principles of the research design as well as an explanation of the research design itself. I then review academic literature relevant to artistic play, including sources in practical theology, religious education, theology of play, and theological aesthetics.

Chapter 2

Method and Literature Review

A practical theology of play through art differs from either play theology or theology of play. David Miller writes that play theology assumes that the structures and dynamics of play are obvious and fully understood. In this approach, “this phenomenon of play is applied to ailing or otherwise obtuse and abstract theology, thereby giving it new life” (Miller 1970, xvii).[1] Having no interest in rehabilitating traditional theology for its own sake, this project makes no attempt to contribute to play theology as Miller describes. However, this study does not align exactly with the opposite approach, which is theology of play, where “one presumably confronts an unknown but happy mystery, the phenomenon of play, with something well-known in advance, a viable form of classical theology” (Miller 1970, xvii).[2] Like theology of play, this project assumes that artistic play is an unknown phenomenon, however it does not apply established categories of classical theology to illumine it. Rather, this study takes an empirical approach, allowing the case studies to reveal how meaning is made by those who practice it. While I place these insights in mutually critical dialogue with “interpreters of faith” (Lee 1997), they do not necessarily represent classic theological perspectives, and they do not have unequivocal authority over the data.

To ask, “How does artistic play allow people to seek the God of the Unexpected?” is partly a question to shed light on the unknown that is artistic play, yet it is also a question with implications for the future of religious education and practical theology. In

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[1] According to Miller, Sam Keen is an example of this strategy. I address both his work in the literature review.
[2] Miller cites the work of Robert Neale as an example of this approach, which I discuss in the literature review.

light of my research question, I use ethnographic methods to gather data, and I apply two analytic frameworks (performance theory and object relations theory) to construct more refined understandings of artistic play. At the same time, the lens of my faith commitments colors the gathering, interpretation, and writing of data. My commitments to thick description of artistic play and to understanding it in theological terms inform the principles of the research design.

Principles Informing the Research Design

1. Empiricism

Johannes van der Ven traces empirical theology to 1975, when the Nijmegan Department of Pastoral Theology adopted an intradisciplinary approach, applying the methodology of empirical research to the field of pastoral theology (1993, 2). According to van der Ven, the term "empirical theology" was borrowed by German Protestant theologians writing in the late sixties and early seventies. Evidently, they were influenced by American thinkers like John Dewey and William James, writing on experience and pragmatism (van der Ven 1993, 3, 6). By designing a project with a strong empirical approach, I align myself with van der Ven and other major work in practical theology past and present.

In the field of practical theology, I ally myself with scholars who explore what people do (and make) to understand what they believe. As I mentioned earlier, this project's approach is similar to Elaine Graham's work, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (2002). To explore what it means to be human, she examines two key discourses—Western technoscience and pop

culture. According to Graham, monsters depicted in fiction and narrative are representations of what it means to be human. She argues that representations are powerful in that they "serve not only to portray and report, but to legitimate, to reproduce and to normalize; or to subvert, to contradict and destabilize" (Graham 2002, 26). Representations such as those found in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, artificial intelligence, or the Human Genome Project provide Graham with windows into this contentious process of post-modern meaning-making. As I said earlier, I share with Graham an interest in analyzing what people make to reveal what they believe or come to know. Both of us take a radically empiricist approach to our projects. While film, literature, and techno-scientific research are her data; performance art, artifacts, and spaces are mine. Graham explores creative fabrications of popular culture and technoscience, while this project examines what people create through artistic play.

Another close ally to my work is Mary Elizabeth Moore. Moore takes an empirical approach to practical theology in the spirit of van der Ven, though through qualitative anthropological study (1998, 241). In her study of the social dynamics of two religious communities in the Greater Los Angeles area, Moore (1998) takes an ethogenic approach, based on the work of Rom Harré, P.F. Secord, and their colleagues. In this method, researchers observe "all dimensions of human interaction with one another, with the earth, and with the holy. It also includes gathering accounts from individuals and groups in the congregation in order to hear their different perspectives in life in their community" (Moore 1998, 245). Much of her work reflects an interest in what Allen Moore characterizes as "folk theology." He writes, "We have little understanding as to how ordinary people in their practical activities utilize theological concepts and what

content these concepts have for them. Likewise, we have little knowledge as to the source of theology for most people and how they arrive at their theological universe of meaning" (Moore 1975, 10). In folk theology, he says, "[F]ormal beliefs (what one says they believe) is of less importance than doing (what beliefs are expressed in action). It is assumed here that anyone who thinks about ultimate meaning is engaged in a theological enterprise" (Moore 1975, 10-11).

Underlying the radically empiricist approach I take in this project is a belief in the everyday sacred, which I share with other practical theologians. For example, according to feminist theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore, meaning for women can emerge even in the midst of domestic chaos, and spiritual grounding can be practiced in the most mundane of ways (even changing diapers), though religious traditions and the academy are afraid to celebrate biological processes, child care, and children as occasions for spiritual growth (2003, 154-5). Such practical knowledge is trivialized and therefore marginalized. Attention is also given to the everyday sacred in Nicola Slee's study on women's faith development. She finds that women's narratives strongly emphasize ordinary, concrete, and mundane experience as the locus of spiritual awakening, which include such experiences as motherhood, illness, and relating to those who suffer (Slee, 2004, 133). Both Miller-McLemore and Slee's work are part of a broader movement in practical theology to affirm the everyday as a legitimate life-world in which meaning is made and the holy is encountered. For example, Mary Elizabeth Moore argues for approaching everyday life practices, like teaching, nurturing, and giving thanks as sacraments. Sacramental living is "living that mediates divine grace in the church and the world" (Moore 2004, 22). In addition, the everyday sacred is affirmed by Günther

Heimbock, who argues that everyday life is a province of meaning that contains not just the same, the dull, and the irrational but also the potential to transcend the actual facts and to experience the holy (2001, 108). According to Heimbock, the central task of practical theology is to understand theologically "the relation of a human being as subject of his/her religion in close relation to everyday life reality" (2001, 110).

The radically empiricist approach that I share with other practical theologians is parallel to the study of "lived religion" by historians, though they stop short of making normative claims. In a volume called *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Hall 1997), contributors move away from denominationalism and institutional religious constructs of Protestantism, Catholicism, etc. Instead, these authors are interested in "how particular people, in particular places and times, live in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in culture--*all* the idioms, including (often enough) those not explicitly there 'own'" (Orsi 1997, 7). Robert Orsi writes, "The shared methodology of this collection is radically or phenomenologically empiricist, concerned with what people *do* with religious practice, what they make with it of themselves and their worlds" (1997, 7). For example, in her essay on "Golden Rule Christians" contained in the volume, Nancy Ammerman argues that they are best characterized not by what they believe but by what they do. As Orsi puts it, "The authors of this volume point us to creativity and improvisational power of theology as a component of lived experience, to the practice of *theologizing* in determinate circumstances" (1997, 9). Such colleagues in history of religions provide this project with helpful conversation partners who share a commitment to radical empiricism in the study of religious practices.

2. Subjectivity

My radically empiricist approach to artistic play includes not only collecting data on people's experience of artistic play, but also documenting and considering my own. My choices of topic, research question, and cases studies were initially based on personal experiences with artistic play, therefore it would be impossible for me to be "objective" about artistic play even if I desired it. For both case studies, I take a subjective approach to artistic play, integrated with systematic data collection and deeper analysis of the experiences of those who participate in the study. In the case of my family and the church, I have no way to fully separate myself from the fact I am studying my mother, her art, and the church in which I grew up in. Many of my initial assumptions about her art came from my personal experience of it, assumptions that I later tested in fieldwork. In the case of InterPlay, I involved myself as much as I could as a member of the InterPlay community, which included being trained as an InterPlay leader, not simply to engage in participant observation, but because I hoped to experience spiritual transformation in the process.

The subject of artistic play lends itself to the personal involvement of the researcher in the sense that art is evocative, and as a result, art is bound to evoke something in the researcher. In an introduction to arts-based research, which involves making art as a primary way of understanding and examining experience both by researchers and subjects, Elliot Eisner writes, "The evocative has as its ambition the provision of a set of qualities that create an empathic sense of life in those who encounter it, whether the work is visual or linguistic, choreographic or musical. In all cases,

emotion and imagination are involved. Art in research puts a premium on evocation, even when it has sections or aspects of it that are descriptive of character. Put another way, art is present in research when its presence enables one to participate vicariously in a situation" (Eisner 2008, 6). In gathering data for InterPlay, for example, I often witnessed performances created by participants, which allowed me to enter the fictive world they were creating with their art. However, I also created performance art as I engaged the practice, allowing my experience of dancing, singing, and storytelling to become data for the project. While my involvement in the artistic process is limited, I borrow from arts-based research its recognition and trust in the researcher's subjective experience of art as valuable data.

The subjective approach of this project flies in the face of classic anthropology, which encourages participant observation while maintaining objectivity. Describing this strange tension, Ruth Behar writes how Clifford Geertz (along with Lévi-Strauss, Evans Pritchard, Malinowski, and Benedict) approaches anthropology as person-specific and yet somehow not personal. For example, Geertz harshly criticizes ethnographic writing that takes an autobiographical stance on fieldwork, insisting that it is inappropriate to interiorize too much 'what is in fact an intensely public activity'" (Behar, 1996, 8). Disagreeing with Geertz, Behar argues for what she calls "vulnerable writing," where fieldwork and ethnographic writing are infused with the personal and the subjective in order to further the research in ways that could not be advanced otherwise. In the wake of Freudianisms, structuralisms, and post-structuralisms; vulnerable writing, says Behar, follows other anthological and feminist "efforts to map an intermediate space we can't quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity,

and ethnography and autobiography, art and life" (Behar 1996, 174). I return to this in a moment as I discuss the vulnerabilities of this project.

Recognizing the shortcomings of an objective, cognitivist approach to fieldwork, Colin Turnbull argues that a classically trained anthropologist will be tempted to see only obvious interpretations of ritual, which are important though may not capture the total significance of the ritual (1990, 75). If a researcher is solely dedicated to intellect and objectivity, the anthropologist is likely to perceive only what (s)he sees and hears, focusing mainly on what (s)he can translate into words or the words themselves, failing to pay attention to other modes of communication and perception, including senses of smell, taste, and touch, or to nonverbal sound (Turnbull 1990, 76-7). Turnbull writes that a superficial understanding of other cultures "is directly proportional to the superficiality of our participation in that culture" (1990, 51). He makes a radical proposal that combines "total abandon and conscious, rational investigation" (Turnbull 1990, 75). By "total abandon," Turnbull means participating emotionally in the culture being studied, even with an openness to being personally or spiritually transformed, as he was in his fieldwork with the Mbuti. Turnbull argues that this subjective approach provides a wealth of data that can not be gathered otherwise, and which in no way detracts from intellectual analytical ability.

This project's experiential, subjective approach involves vulnerability on my part. For example, when I began to write about artistic play in my family and the church of my childhood, I felt reluctant to refer to my mother as "Mom." Yet, calling her "Naomi" would be disrespectful in my culture, and referring to her as "Goto" would be too clinical and objectivist given the intimacy of our relationship. Underneath was (and maybe still

is) a creeping fear that it is unprofessional to use my mother's art as a spring board for serious academic inquiry.

I am not alone in my anxieties about vulnerable writing. Kay Redfield Jamison, an established professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, co-authored a standard medical text on manic-depressive illness and revealed in a memoir that she suffers the same illness. Jamison writes, "Will my work now be seen by my colleagues as somehow biased because of my illness?... [I]f, for example, I am attending a scientific meeting and ask a question, or challenge a speaker, will my question be treated as though it is coming from someone who has studied and treated mood disorders for many years, or will it instead be seen as a highly subjective, idiosyncratic view of someone who has a personal ax to grind?" (Jamison 1995, 203) Vulnerable writing, says Behar, is neither a decorative flourish nor exposure for its own sake, rather "[t]he exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to" (Behar 1996, 14). In Jamison's case, she gives up what she calls "the cloak of academic objectivity" (1996, 203), but she reveals how her emotions and experiences with manic-depressive illness have colored her work.

Though I risk not being taken seriously by studying Mom and her art, I do so partly to give voice to one woman's experience. As feminist scholars have noted, women's wisdom and experience, especially domestic experience, are often left out of the canons of curriculum. According to educational theorist Madeleine Grumet,

> [W]omen's standpoint is one which honors the connection and intimacy between those who share the actual time and space of everyday life. The power of those who bear babies and nurture them, who order the provision of food, decide what is clean and dirty, who wash sheets and care for the aged is palpable. Repressed, this creativity has been repudiated by the myth of immaculate conception, the myth of menstrual contamination; it has been inverted into violence and

> destruction; it has been appropriated by abstract disciplines of knowledge, bureaucratic systems and the production and collection of things called property. (Madeline Grumet, "Curriculum and the Art of Daily Life," in *Reflections from the Heart of Educational Inquiry: Understanding Curriculum and Teaching through the Arts*, edited by G. Willis and W. H. Schubert [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991], 84)

According to Grumet, practical knowledge brought from home, much of which involves mothers, remains largely unexamined—embedded in images, sense memories, stories, and emotions (1991, 75). Without thinking, people continue to separate home and school into private and public spheres, rarely extending practical knowledge of home to work in the public world, which means experiences of home remain marked as inappropriate for "the real world," and, therefore, an unusable past (Grumet 1991, 75). Traditional views like that of Geertz and others simply encourage these choices. Grumet argues for providing a language that reclaims and resymbolizes domestic knowledge in order for it to inform the processes of education (1991, 87). She proposes that we start with narrative, which situates knowledge in time and place.

Performance art, narratives, artifacts, space, and images are my data because they locate, situate, and contextualize pedagogical approaches practiced in two cases. Each case has its own particular location, history, and context. In neither case do I attempt to be objective, rather I theorize about InterPlay, Mom's art, and our family's church having lived with or experienced them all. My narrative, subjective approach is influenced by Lorraine Code's notion of storied epistemology, which claims that knowledge is local, situated, and socially produced. According to Code, listening to and telling stories "breaks with the practice of representing the history of modern-day epistemology as a voiceless history—an inevitable, impersonal march toward an ideal epistemic convergence" (1995, 157).

3. Hermeneutics

In addition to radical empiricism and subjectivity as principles of this project's research design, it also includes a third principle—hermeneutics. Although I gather data through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and videography, I am not an ethnographer with the goal of writing culture. Rather, I am a practical theologian using ethnographic methods to explore a practice that has implications for religious education and practical theology. Much of practical theology is grounded in analysis provided by the humanities and social sciences informed by theology. For example, Don Browning uses Geertz's term, "thick description" to describe the task of descriptive theology, which later guides the practical theological task of normative reconstruction. He writes, "To describe situations [thickly] is to describe how people think and act practically in specific contexts. To describe situations is to describe the forms of phronēsis that actors use in concrete situations" (Browning 1991, 97). While Geertz' notion of thick description concerns capturing the complexity and depth of cultures being studied, Browning adds the Aristotelian understanding of phronēsis to make normative claims. Browning proposes five dimensions of moral thinking that comprise the "thickness of practice."[3] Because I find Browning's model to be too prescriptive, I am not using the model he proposes, but Browning illustrates how a practical theologian's use of anthropology begins to take on hermeneutical flavor.

[3] See Don Browning's, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, Chapters 5-6.

The practical theological method I am using is perhaps more similar to Bernard Lee than Don Browning. Lee proposes "phronetic theology," based on David Tracy's work. Lee writes,

> I propose that phronetic/praxic concern is clarified and characterized through what David Tracy describes as a mutually critical conversation between our interpretations of our faith and our interpretations of our natural and social worlds. Scripture, doctrine, liturgy, tradition, popular religion, religious education, pastoral care and counseling, etc., as interpretations of faith, are partners in dialogue. Anthropology, ecology, economics, sociology, theories of administration and management (for the analysis of action systems), etc., as interpretations of relational systems, are partners in dialogue. The dialogue between them, in which they interrogate one another and respond to one another, is mutually critical. (Bernard Lee, "Practical Theology as Phronetic: A Working Paper from/for Those in Ministry Education," *APT Occasional Papers* 1 [Winter), 2])

Like Browning, Lee encourages dialogue between social science and faith. However, I like Lee's broader understanding of the interpretations of faith. While most practical theologians (including Browning) turn exclusively to Christian scripture and doctrine as unequivocal interlocutors, Lee extends the conversation to other interpreters of faith, including popular religion and fields of study such as religious education and pastoral care. In doing so, Lee makes room for additional dialogue partners for this project, including theological aesthetics, theology of play, and Asian American theology. Lee goes on to write, "Because the mutually critical dialogue is always, and can only be, between interpretations of faith and interpretations of our relational world, hermeneutics is central to *phronetic* theology" (1998, 2). The hermeneutics that this project draws upon is informed by diverse interpreters of faith, which includes but is not limited to Christian scripture and doctrines. I take this approach in part to promote a future of practical theology that is more diverse and global.

To illustrate how hermeneutics shapes my research, I need to clarify where I would place myself in the diverse field of practical theology. In Moore's description of the spectrum of practical theologians, I identify with those who "engage in social analysis for the purpose of stirring public discourse and guiding transformed action, both in church and society. These theologians seek to develop contextual theologies, culturally sensitive approaches to ministry, and/or praxis-grounded contributions to public discourse" (Moore 2004, 177). In this project, I am interested in artistic play as a transformative practice with implications for both church and society. For an example of a contribution to practical theology concerned with social analysis and transformed society, Moore refers to Robert Schreiter, whose work I cite in this project. Both of my case studies could be viewed as what Schreiter calls "local theologies" constructed in response to specific histories, needs, and local cultures. According to Moore, "The unique contribution of practical theologians who focus on context is found in their methods for studying diverse communities, for analyzing the dynamics of community life with social science and theological resources, and for proposing actions that are contextually relevant and specific" (2004, 177).

Research Design

Fieldwork

Fieldwork for this dissertation began with preliminary research on InterPlay. I first learned about InterPlay in the summer of 2004, when a colleague told me about a practice she experienced in a class with Cynthia Winton-Henry at the Graduate Theological Union. Curious about the practice, I introduced myself to Phil and Cynthia

at a luncheon at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, where they were teaching a week-long seminar on InterPlay. While preliminary fieldwork with InterPlayers in Denver allowed me to form early ideas about the practice, over the next four years through 2008, I engaged in more intense fieldwork with the InterPlay founders in Oakland, California, gathering more data, testing ideas, and returning for more.

My InterPlay fieldwork consisted of interviews, participant observation, surveys, and collecting InterPlay literature such as books, curriculum, and organizational email. Interviews and participant observation provided the major data for the project. From 2004-08, I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews of participants, leaders, and founders of InterPlay, which involved twenty-six people. I met and recruited some of the interviewees at InterPlay events, but many were referred to me by Phil and Cynthia. I engaged in participant observation in InterPlay classes, workshops (called "un-tensives"), leadership conference calls, and Wing-It! rehearsals.[4] I also enrolled in what was then called the InterPlay Leadership Program, which (at the time) was designed for people to teach InterPlay.[5] This involved two week-long retreats in California that immersed participants in the "secrets" of doing and leading InterPlay. Included in the Leadership Program were three group focus sessions and individual mentoring sessions with Cynthia, which I completed over time.[6] Documentation techniques included field notes, audio-taping, and videography.

Fieldwork for the case study involving my mother's art and my family's church came later. Theological reflection about my mother, her art, and artistic play at the

[4] Wing-It! is an InterPlay group that gives public performances.
[5] Since then, the InterPlay Leadership Program has been divided into the InterPlay Life Practice Program and the Leader Training Program.
[6] Focus sessions allow a person to receive the focus of the group on an issue of the person's choice. An example of a focus session is discussed later.

Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC) began in 2007, however I did not test my early assumptions in fieldwork until nearly a year later. I conducted eighteen semi-structured interviews with twenty-three people, including church members and clergy past and present. All interviews were conducted at the church or in members' homes in Sacramento, California, with the exception of three in the San Francisco Bay area. All interviewees were known to me prior to fieldwork, with the exception of the church architect. Participant observation included attending gardening sessions at the church and other church activities. Documentation techniques included fieldwork, audio-taping, and still photography.

Analytic Frameworks

To interpret the data, I employ two analytic frameworks—object relations theory and performance theory. In the first case study on artistic play in a Japanese American church and family, object relations serves as the primary lens since this case involves artifacts and visual art, which I analyze in terms of transitional objects. However, performance theory provides a secondary lens that draws attention to context and the construction of self through performance. For InterPlay, the second case study, performance theory serves as the primary analytic lens since this case involves the performing arts. However, object relations theory contributes secondarily to the analysis with important perspectives on transitional space and depth analysis of the self. Both frameworks are complimentary in that both address issues of play, liminality, and the construction of self, though from different points of view.

Object Relations Theory

While object relations theory has been the work of numerous scholars, I focus on D. W. Winnicott's theories on play and the construction of reality. He theorizes about an infant's first experiences of play, yet he points to the implications of play through adulthood in the form of cultural experience, such as religion and art. Scholars who have followed Winnicott have built on his work in these areas. Between Winnicott and those that have followed, there is an analytical framework that triangulates play, art, and religion, which marks a rich intersection for studying artistic play.

Winnicott's account of the infant's experience of play is vital to understanding object relations theory. The "good-enough" mother makes her baby feel that the world is reliable and responsive by providing the breast on demand, giving the infant the illusion that (s)he is "creating" the breast (Winnicott 1971, 10; 1964, 90, 157, 183). By holding and nursing the infant, the mother gives the baby a sense of aliveness or "I am myself" (Winnicott 1965, 145, 224). However, the process of weaning confronts the baby with the reality that (s)he does not have ominipotent control over the breast, that it is not an extension of him/herself (Winnicott 1964, 72). Therefore, the infant creates a mother substitute in what she finds or is given, what Winnicott calls a transitional object (1971, 3). Classic examples include a thumb, blanket, or teddy bear. The object mother allows the child to invent a mother that is at his/her disposal, validating a sense of "me" or "mine" (Winnicott 1964, 163). However, at some point, the child destroys the object mother, by placing it outside of the child's imaginative control (Winnicott 1977, 189-90). For example, when a child realizes the blanket is just a blanket (what Winnicott calls "object use"), it is destroyed, providing a sense of "not-me," yet the blanket "survives in

reality" (1971, 90). Rather than a one-time event, object creation and destruction happens over and over, which is the play that Winnicott describes. This imaginative, transitional space of play between the "me" and the "not-me" is vital to the development of the self from infancy through adulthood.

Winnicott claims that the need to confront and accept reality spans a lifetime, only beginning with experience as infants. He writes, "[T]he task of reality-acceptance is never completed…[N]o human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and…[R]elief from the strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (art, religion, etc.)" (Winnicott 1971, 18). For adults, cultural experience is located in this intermediate or potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play (Winnicott 1971, 138-9). Interpreting Winnicott, Ann Ulanov explains,

> As we grow up, the space between us and others, between our unconscious and reality, between our subjectivity and objectivity, becomes the space of culture and establishes where we live when we feel most alive and real.[2] A baby's favorite toy or an adult's favorite cultural activity—what Winnicott calls a transitional object—takes on the symbolic function of putting together the opposites we experience when we feel utterly dependent on an other—whether mother or some source outside ourselves—and at the same time grow independent of the other and begin creatively to fashion our own, original experience. (Ann Belford Ulanov, *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 14)
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> [2] Winnicott, 1971. *Playing and Reality*, 40-41, 47, 55-56, 100.

According to Ulanov, this originality is at the heart of what Winnicott calls living creatively.[7] Although people do not invent transitional objects anew (i.e., the teddy bear

[7] Ulnov cites Winnicott's *Living Creatively* (1970), 39-42.

or the concert), she claims, people "achieve [their] own, fresh experiences" that make them aware of "feeling alive and real and glad for it" (Ulanov, 2001, 14).

Object relations theory provides an appropriate analytic frame for artistic play because Winnicott and his antecedents, especially in the field of object relations aesthetics, draw significant parallels between play and the experience of art. According to Peter Rudnytsky, just as the mother (or other primary caregiver) "endow[s] her infant with a capacity for illusion by making her love (metonymically represented by the breast) available on demand," and she disillusions the infant through gradual failures of empathy, "[a]rt provides a lifelong refuge to which we can turn as we negotiate our precarious oscillations between illusion and reality" (Rudnytsky 1993, xiii). Rudnytsky goes on to argue, "Art, like play, must be situated in both a *temporal* and a *spatial* dimension, as Winnicott does with his concepts of transitional and potential space" (Rudnytsky 1993, xiii). In this transitional space, argues Malcolm Bowie, the work of art exists in a "no man's land" because it is the realm of push and pull, to and from, "reach[ing] toward the complex, the subtle-minded integration of divergent and heterogeneous raw materials yet reaches backwards, too, to something primordial and pre-sexual" (Bowie 2001, 16-17). Paradoxically, says Bowie, the work of art facilitates integration and closure made possible by the creative mind, yet it takes a person to the edge of fearful, new openness.

According to other theorists in object relations aesthetics, Winnicott also speaks to play and the process of making art. Interpreting Winnicott's notion that the baby feels that it has created the breast, Ken Wright suggests that the infant feels, "I have created the world" or perhaps, "The world is a responsive place (a responsive medium) that I can transform into what I have imagined" (2001, 81). According to Wright, Winnicott's work

suggests that this early experience of omnipotence is the basis of later creativity, including the capacity to play (making things be for a while what is desired) or to make art (shaping a medium to express the imagined). "In Winnicott's view," says Wright, "whenever we fashion a world infused with our own subjectivity—whenever, in his terms, we make for ourselves a subjective object—we provide for ourselves what the mother originally provided for us" (Wright 2001, 81). Within the artistic process of various genres, Bowie sees "ingenious play being sustained" as objects are being created and used thereby destroyed (Bowie 2001, 28-29). He claims Winnicott's theoretical language is compatible with the craft languages of artistic disciplines or techniques as diverse as narrative theory, Viennese sonata form, and or paint-dripping in the manner of Jackson Pollock. Bowie writes, "With his emphasis on potentiality, and on destructiveness and creativity in perpetual dialogue, Winnicott is in a sense telling artists, and enthusiasts for art, what they already know. But alone among the great psychoanalysts, he does seem to understand the working conditions of excitement, uncertainty, and fear in which artists labor and into which their works may precipitate us" (Bowie 2001, 28-29).

Object relations theory also provides an appropriate analytic frame for artistic play because of its implications for religion. In the *Birth of the Living God* (1979), a classic in religion and object relations theory, Ana-Maria Rizzuto argues that God is a transitional object located in transitional space, referencing Winnicott specifically. However, God is a special transitional object in that "unlike teddy bears, dolls, or blankets made from plushy fabrics, he [sic] is created from representational materials whose sources are the representations of primary objects" (Rizzuto 1979, 178). In other

words, God is only known by analogy unlike the sensual stuff of teddy bears. Rizzuto goes on to argue, "God is also a special transitional object because he [sic] does not follow the usual course of other transitional objects" (1979, 178), referring to Winnicott's view that transitional objects are gradually allowed to be decathected and lose meaning. God is special in that God "is always potentially available for further acceptance or further rejection" (Rizzuto 1979, 179), even in times when humans abandon God. According to Rizzuto, the process of creating and finding God never ceases, citing the same passage from Winnicott I excerpted above about the task of reality-acceptance never being complete (Winnicott 1971, 18). However, God is not a mental representation simply of human making, but also a "cultural creation" offered for people's private and public use (in the form of religion). In the case of the former, humans are in the process of finding and creating a "private God," which reflects back a sense of self (Rizzuto 1979, 179).

Building on Rizzuto, Ann Ulanov also locates religion "in the space between subjectivity and objectivity, between our unconscious and conscious, between faith and fact" (2001, 18). For example, she points out how religious experience is "neither totally outside ourselves, like a lightning bolt, nor totally from inside ourselves, as from a dream, but in the space in between" (Ulanov 2001, 20). Rather the God revealed is neither completely transcendent nor totally immanent. In this transitional space, religious life "opens up to us a range of play with religious objects that symbolize our coming to be a self in unity with a good-enough God (Ulnaov 2001, 13)." Human experience and understanding of God is not simply given, rather it is similar to the way "the baby finds the mother it creates and creates the mother it finds," even as the mother feeds and

excites this illusion (Ulanov 2001, 30). People build a sense of God through what Ulanov calls "subjective-object God images" and "objective-object God images," representing personal images of God and those given by tradition or society, neither of which capture God fully.[8] Taking both sets of images in religious life,

> we enter an energetic space of contemplative action and active contemplation that grants us the illusion of finding as our own the self that has been given us and creating the giver we find behind it and in it. This makes for a lively scene, for we pray to a God we imagine, knowing all the while that our God-image betrays the presence of the God it points to—betrays in the sense of covering it, masking it, distorting it, yet also in the sense of giving way to it, uncovering it, exposing us to its reality. (Ann Belford Ulanov, *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 30)

According to Ulanov, faith involves this dynamic creation and revision of God images, involving creativity and destructiveness, illusion, and reality. At stake is not the truth or falsity of God, but rather whether people experience God in a way that feels real or in a way that is deadening. For Ulanov, an object relations view of religion poses the question of whether religion is alive or dead (2001, 18).

Notice how the scholars in object relations aesthetics I discussed fail to mention religion, just as scholars interested in religion and object relations theory fail to consider art, though Winnicott mentions both as examples of cultural experience. This project draws upon object relations literature that addresses art or religion, though these streams of scholarship appear to have little contact with each other.

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[8] This is where Ulanov extends Rizzuto. While Rizzuto recognizes that God representations are partly cultural creations, Ulanov elaborates this by calling them "objective-object images," which accounts for the influence of religion in shaping images of God. This reflects Ulanov's stronger interest in religion and psychology, whereas Rizzuto flatly states, "This is not a book on religion" (1979, 177).

Performance Theory

The second analytic lens for this project is performance theory, which also has significant ties to religion, art, and play. According to Edward Schieffelin, much of the conceptual terminology of performance theory takes its inspiration from Western notions of theatrical performance. He says, "[S]pecific cultural genres such as rituals are seen as analogous to theatrical performances, or everyday activities can be seen as brought off through expressive processes analogous to those by which imaginative realities are produced on the stage" (Schieffelin 1998, 195). Influenced by notions of theater, performance theory has a natural sensitivity toward art and aesthetics, as well as for play or "playing pretend" as much of theater involves.

Because the case studies mostly involve aesthetic events, this project uses Richard Bauman's definition of performance. In his usage, performance is "[a] mode of communicative behavior and a type of communicative event" that "suggests an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience" (Bauman 1992, 41). In this approach, performance refers to symbolic or aesthetic activities such as ritual, theatrical, or artistic folk activities. Studies with this understanding of performance, like that of Bauman, "focus on the structure of such events, the means by which they are carried out (or have their effect), and their relation to social context" (Schieffelin 1998, 194-5). Approaching performance as an aesthetic event will shed light on InterPlay, which involves the creation and practice of performance art, and on the art created at Mom's church, which involves ritual and visual art. Both cases involve audiences—be it members of the community and/or God.

This project will sometimes address performativity. For scholars such as Erving Goffman, performativity is "the expressive process of strategic impression management and structured improvisation through which human beings normally articulate their purposes, situations and relationships in everyday social life…" (Schieffelin 1998, 195). As Goffman (1959) has suggested, when human beings come into each other's presence, they negotiate working agreements about social identity and purpose more through voice, gestures, facial expressions, body posture and action than rational discourse. Performativity is relevant for this project in two ways.

First, because InterPlay is based on artistic forms of improvisation (i.e., vocal music, dance, and theater), every performance has a performative edge. InterPlay performance is constantly being negotiated between performers with or without an audience as the participants interact with one another, creating with their collective resources. Schieffelin calls this the "performativity of performance" (1998, 198).

Second, the notion of performativity is important in analyzing the performance of interviews. On one hand, interviews are performances in Bauman's sense of the term, a communicative event involving me as the audience. For example, InterPlayers I interviewed often performed their stories with laughter, tears, and sound effects. On the other hand, there is the performativity of the interviews themselves, namely the feeling out process involved between those I interviewed and myself, which was especially noticeable in interviews with Japanese American church members, where silent rules of interaction and negotiation apply.

Having identified the "what" of peformance theory, I turn to the "how" of performance theory. According to Catherine Bell, while religious studies has

traditionally used the language of performance to describe ritual activity as an enacted script, current performance studies approaches focus on "the explicitly unscripted dimensions of an activity in process" (1998, 205-6). The difference would be, for example, examining how a traditional church service follows a liturgical pattern versus identifying the qualities of the ritual action itself. Bell describes the current performance studies approach as an "action-oriented perspective focused on the doing itself" (1998, 206). She writes, "[T]hese new methods employ the language of performance to try to decode action as action by going beyond the textual framework standard to decoding analysis" (Bell 1998, 206).

Bell identifies several tasks of performance theory that are relevant for this project. One is to reveal how activities create culture. She says, "Performance approaches seek to explore how activities *create* culture, authority, transcendence, and whatever forms of holistic ordering are required for people to act in meaningful and effective ways. Hence, by virtue of this underlying concern, performance terminology analyzes both religious and secular rituals as orchestrated events that construct people's perceptions and interpretations" (Bell 1998, 208). It is important to note that the assumption made in performance studies is that human beings are "active creators of both cultural continuity and change rather than passive inheritors of the system who are conditioned from birth to replicate it" (Bell 1998, 209). This assumption is particularly helpful in analyzing case studies where people are actively involved in the creative process of artistic play. Many performance studies scholars engage in a second task—describing the "efficacy that distinguishes ritual activities from related activities such as literal communication, routine labor, or pure entertainment" (Bell 1998, 209). While Bell

admits that there is less consensus about this as a common task for performance theory, she argues, "However embryonic, these attempts to explore the peculiar efficacy of performance illustrate a major goal of performance theory: to show that ritual action does what it does by virtue of its dynamic, diachronic, physical, and sensual characteristics" (Bell 1998, 209). This interest in efficacy supports a phenomenological approach to my research question and design.

Performance theory addresses certain concerns in common with object relations theory. First, many performance studies scholars recognize the element of the *ludic* in ritual, captured for example in the notion of the play frame, referred to in Gregory Bateson's classic work, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. According to Barbara Myerhoff, ritual performances testify to the human capacity "to endlessly bring new possibilities into being without entirely relinquishing the old, prior understandings that have given rise to them; we make magic, believe in it and do not, at once, we make ourselves anew, yet remain familiar to ourselves, are capable of being carried away, changed, yet know fully and freely exactly what we are doing and why" (Myerhoff 1990, 249). This imaginative play between old and new is reminiscent of the vacillating nature of play described by object relations theory. In fact, Winnicott would likely say that the rituals, festivals, and other practices that concern performance theorists are all cultural experiences derived from the earliest experiences of play.

Performance theory shares a second concern with object relations theory—that is liminality, which is not unlike transitional spaces. For example, in his study of the Ndembu people, *Schism and Continuity*, Victor Turner argues that ritual involves a dialectic tension between structure and anti-structure, building on the insights of Arnold

van Gannep. Interpreting Turner, John MacAloon explains that while ritual preserves social order and continuity by "organizing and managing the passage of persons from one set of normative positions, roles, rules, and social states to another," ritual also allows people to enter a "state of liminality, all manner of unexpected, dangerous, or potentially creative things may happen" (MacAloon 1984, 3). With this interest in liminality, performance studies provides an interesting conversation partner with object relations theory, with its concern for transitional space, which can also be characterized by surprise, destructiveness, as well as creativity. Winnicott is mostly interested in the development of individuals, while Turner is focused on culture and social change, however the two appear surprisingly related.

Performance theory has two concerns that are strongly its own, making it a helpful complement to object relations theory. While transitional space is discussed in object relations theory, it tends be an abstraction or a concept rather than a location. Instead, performance theory is sensitive to physical as well as social space created by performance. Likewise, performance theory pays attention to bodies and the bodily dimension of ritual activity, which is rooted in its willingness to move beyond a strictly intellectual assessment of ritual to appreciate the emotional, aesthetic, physical, and sensory aspects of religion (Bell 1998, 209). While the bodies of mother and baby are prominent in Winnicott's explanation of transitional objects in childhood, the body disappears when it comes to discussing transitional phenomena into adulthood, though art and religion are clearly sensual, embodied experiences. Drawing attention to this physicality, performance theory supplements object relations theory with what is often overlooked in discussions of art and religion.

The beauty of having two analytic frameworks is that they compensate for one another. The strength of object relations theory is providing insight into human experience and psyche, which can help address a deficit in anthropology. According to Myerhoff, anthropologists are traditionally weak and vague in "the examination of subjective experiences, psychological states, non-normative and often unconscious information" (1990, 245).[9] However, as an anthropological discipline, performance studies is particularly strong in accounting for context, which tends to be overlooked by object relations theory. The tension between these two frameworks is that performance theory takes an inductive approach to data, while object relations theory tends to be deductive. According to Bell, "Performance theory does not analyze the phenomenal data by shepherding it into preliminary categories; rather, it tries to ask questions that disclose the holistic dynamics of the phenomenon in its own terms as much as possible" (Bell 1998, 211). In contrast, object relations theory would tend to apply its theoretical categories and concepts to data to understand human experience, for example, of art and religion. Cultivating the strengths of both frameworks, this project gives each framework its turn at greater emphasis in a case study, while still being in dialogue with the other framework.

Literature Review

This project's location must be understood in relation to other sources in practical theology, religious education, theology of play, and theological aesthetics as these fields

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[9] Myerhoff says this is especially challenging when working across cultures, "where maximum sensitivity, subtlety, inference and courage are required of ethnographer, not to mention psychological sophistication and depth of experience in and knowledge of the language and culture in which observations are being made" (1990, 245).

relate to art or play. Seen together, these sources comprise a hodge-podge body of literature with holes, intricate gems of handiwork, and thread-bare pieces of work. At present, there is no strong, coherent scholarly body of literature in art and play in the field of religion, only the patchy efforts of an interested few that must be pieced together. This review presents how art and play have been addressed by four fields of study closest to this project (practical theology, religious education, theology of play, theological aesthetics). This is to identify the two separate bodies of literature (art and play) that are being quilted together by this project and to indicate where this project might contribute to gaps in each literature.

Art

The scholarly literature on the intersection of art and theology that relates most to this project is scarce. There is not much work in theological aesthetics that addresses practice and context, or sources in practical theology and religious education that address art. The challenge of finding published work with these particular interests is difficult because the synthetic field of art and theology itself has emerged only since World War II (Yates, 2005, 2). Yates's helpful history of theology and the arts reveals that most scholars have overlooked practical approaches. For example, theological writing of the 1950s and 1960s, notably the work of Tillich and his generation of writers, including John Dillenberger, Nathan Scott, and Tom Driver, read themes such as sin, creation and redemption into the arts, using them as a source of religious and moral questions (Yates 2005, 5). Most of the later writing of the 1970s to the present continues to reflect interest in developing a theology of the arts generally or offering theological interpretations of

art. Scholars such as Doug Adams, James Luther Adams, Jane Daggett Dillenberger, Margaret Miles, and Alejandro R. García-Rivera are among the many who have made such contributions. Most of the literature in arts and theology does not share the assumptions of practical theology and this project's interest in context, bodily experience, and meaning-making in everyday life. However, I highlight the work of scholars who have taken an implicit practical approach to theological aesthetics.

Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Sacred and Profane Beauty: the Holy in Art* (1963) argues that engaging art constitutes a spiritual practice. Van der Leeuw remains perhaps the only scholar to compare what various art forms (both visual and performing) allow humans to know about the holy. For example, in his chapter on dance, he discusses dance and the sacred in historical context, arrives at a phenomenological description of dance, and interprets what the dancer comes to know about God through movement. While this discussion makes a helpful contribution to this project, van der Leeuw is too eager to neatly organize the arts into schemes and hierarchies that explain how the holy is revealed through the arts. He makes the strongest case for the relationship between the pictoral arts and the image of God (revealed in Christ) (van der Leeuw 1963, 328), but assigning particular members of the Trinity to particular art forms seems arbitrary. For example, he argues, "If we try to explore the ground and origin of the divine movement, we arrive at the creation, in the realm of the Father" (van der Leeuw 1963, 329). But here is where metaphor can work against van der Leeuw. If DANCE IS MOVEMENT OF GOD, why cannot music be the voice or sound of God? And why cannot the voice or sound of God be associated with the Father? While his scheme for organizing the arts is problematic, I build on van der Leeuw's assumption that the process of making art is

revelatory. He argues that an artist loses herself to the subject of art, thereby connecting herself to God's love and the ground of all things (1963, 277, 280). Van der Leeuw describes the artistic process as a pilgrimage to the holy place of God, even if the person does not know it (1963, 336).

In the next two works, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Frank Burch Brown, share with me a common interest in art and practical wisdom. In *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (1989), Burch Brown offers important insights about the process of meaning-making in the encounter with art. His attention to perception, body, and context gives his work a phenomenological feel. Particularly helpful is Burch Brown's outline of four modes in which a sense of the transcendent can be mediated aesthetically, which he identifies as negative transcendence, radical transcendence, proximate transcendence, and immanent transcendence (1989, 117-130). His model responds to the question, "How does art disclose the divine?" He argues that art draws a person into a transformational experience that allows her to sense God not through a kind of pure revelation but through one that is contextual. Burch Brown argues that each tradition employs its own aesthetic strategies for expressing something of the reality of the divine, depending on how it assumes humans should be formed and respond to the divine (1989, 130). Burch Brown is a key interlocutor for this project, as I analyze data from lived practices in light of his theory.

In *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (1980), Wolterstorff offers a view of art that also resonates with practical theology, which is that art equips for action and that art is a way of acting in the world (1980, 11). Critical of the institutions of high art which separate art from life (1980, 22), Wolterstorff would be interested in these case

studies of artistic play, which is art-in-action by everyday people. His most helpful discussion for this project concerns how art is involved in "world projection," which in his view is the most important action artists perform. This approach resonates well with performance theory, in its belief that performance creates something in its unfolding. In this case, Wolterstorff argues that art creates worlds that can confirm what a community feels to be real, alter convictions, provoke emotion, and provide models for behavior—all of which shed light on how art engages and transforms (1980, 144-146). Wolterstorff views art as an ethical practice, involving beautifying the everyday world (i.e., outside the institutions of high art) and promoting aesthetic excellence (e.g., in cities and in liturgy) (1980, 181, 184).

Wolterstorff defines too narrow of a role for art in relation to the divine, arguing that Christians should use art to affirm the goodness of God's creation (1980, 72), to "subdue" the natural order for human and divine benefit (1980, 75-77), and to partake of God's *shalom* through enjoyment (1980, 79-84). Much of his theology is limited to discussion of the "artist as responsible servant," which reduces art to a narrowly envisioned, functional tool, with little recognition of the role of mystery, especially in comparison to van der Leeuw. For example, Wolterstorff does not address God's role in the artistic process itself. Though he discusses the artist's search for what he calls "fittingness" (similarity across modalities), which he considers the primary task of the artist (1989, 99), he does not describe it much in theological terms.

In practical theology, there is growing interest in the intersection of art and theology, however few (if any) scholars in practical theology have made art and aesthetics their primary interest. For example, among participants at an international

conference with the theme "Creativity, Imagination and Criticism: The Expressive Dimensions in Practical Theology," there were major scholars in practical theology, including Friedrich Schweitzer, Pamela Couture, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, who are interested in art and aesthetics but whose major scholarship is elsewhere. Nonetheless, such a gathering of practical theologians represents an important contribution in articulating how creativity, expressivity, and imagination are required in all sub-disciplines of practical theology. Keynote speaker Friedrich Schweitzer boldly suggests that the "reappraisal of the aesthetic dimension of practical theology is a truly international phenomenon" (2001, 3). However, Bonnie Miller-McLemore is skeptical, especially as it applies to the U.S., where the arts remain marginalized and privatized in most academic contexts. She says, "[M]y own U.S. context leads me to be far less optimistic about the future of expressive dimensions within practical theology. Theology continues to be driven by cognitive concerns" (Miller-McLemore 2001, 21).

In the conference keynote address, Schweitzer urges colleagues to move beyond the "application model" and to approach practical theology as a theory of action that understands reclaiming human expressivity as its fundamental task (2001, 7). Arguing that Schleiermacher understood religion in terms of intuition and feeling, Schweitzer roots practical theology in the question of how religion as intuition and feeling may be nurtured and how it may be shared with others. He offers a model of practical theology as "critical hermeneutics of culture" (drawing on Ricoeur), which has four aspects.

This project contributes to two aspects of Schweitzer's model. He argues for "hermeneutics of retrieval," which recognize what has been forgotten or suppressed, and is now revealed in distorted images and expressions (Schweitzer 2001, 14). The case

studies in this dissertation pay special attention to experience of people on the margins of mainstream culture, whose stories and visions have rarely been given voice, including people of color, women, and gay men. This paper also expands on Schweitzer's notion of "hermeneutics of renewal and completion," which are aimed at helping people find their own expressive voice on the way to becoming a fuller self (Schweitzer 2001, 14). As discussed later, artistic play is a means through which marginalized people in the case studies can express missing experience.

While most contributions from the field of practical theology to aesthetics have been published as articles or sections of books, a significant volume is Stephen Pattison's, *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts* (2007). Pattision aims "to provide a more critical and complex view of the nature of visual artefacts and relationships with them" and "to encourage exploration of some of the implications for ethics and action of understanding vision, images, and artefacts in a more complex way" (Pattison 2007, 11-12). Pattison challenges the unquestioned Western assumption that inanimate objects are radically inferior and can be used and disposed of at will (2007, 2). While others have written extensively on art objects, Pattison focuses on ordinary, human made objects and the practice of seeing them. Though the author makes clear the book is not a work of theology, Pattison's home discipline is practical theology and alludes to the religious thought and experience about relationships with visible images and artifacts. One of his intentions is "to consider the role that religion, particularly Christianity, has played in shaping understandings of, and relationships with, the realm of visual artefacts" (Pattison 2007, 17). His last chapter is entitled, "Touching God: Christians and Relationships with Visual Artefacts." Pattison is a close ally to this project, with his

interest in the practice of seeing and spiritual knowing and in everyday objects and their implications for the everyday sacred.

In theological education, several studies in the late 1970s and into the 1980s support the significance of art for seminary curriculum, which provide background for this project. One study is John Dillenberger's *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (1986), which illuminates the role of the arts in the church and theological thought, calls for the development of the church's artistic sensibilities, and concludes with an agenda for theological education. A second study is Yates's *The Arts in Theological Education* (1987), an empirical study exploring the state of the arts in theological education and the relationship of the arts to theological study with models for interpreting art theologically. A major contribution of Yates's volume is to reveal why and how the arts have been integrated in theological education, summarized in four primary reasons. According to the study, "The arts could serve as a means for: understanding culture, communicating the Christian faith, enabling students' preparation for ministry, and shaping theological education as a whole" (Yates 2005, 16).[10] Yates cites these landmark studies to suggest that institutions for theological education have provided (and continue to provide) rich soil for the growth of scholarly work in theology and the arts (2005, 15). Of interest to this project, his 1987 study reveals how art has been integrated in the practical education of students receiving theological education.

Closer to the focus of this project is work in religious education and the arts. *Teaching & Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (1991) by Maria Harris remains a classic in religious imagination and aesthetic teaching, but has

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[10] Yates's 1987 study extrapolates eight more specific reasons for including and integrating the arts in theological study.

had little follow up by the field. According to Harris, "Teaching, when seen as an activity of religious imagination, is an act of incarnating subject matter in ways which (or in order to) reveal subject matter so that subjects, in communion with each of other, are able to exercise power, the capacity and ability to act receptively, intelligently, humanly, responsibly, and religiously in transforming the universe" (1991, 88). While many have recently addressed religious imagination, Harris brings insight to what religious imagination is and how it can be evoked in the context of teaching, which grounds a philosophical concept in practice. Furthermore, her notion of teaching as the incarnation or embodiment of subject matter sheds light on art and pedagogy, particularly how learning involves giving form to ideas, emotions, and narratives for the sake of individual or communal transformation. In addition, Harris offers an excellent model for aesthetic teaching as she reflects on the pedagogy of Mary Anderson Tully, who taught learners how to express themselves and think through and with art. Although Harris writes from the context of classroom teaching, she provides theoretical concepts and models that reveal the pedagogical value of art in other educational contexts.

Most of what is published in religious education are practical guides using the arts to transmit the Christian message (e.g. art projects to teach the Bible, banners in worship, etc.). The ubiquity of these sources, rather than work like that of Harris, is evidence of how the church has traditionally relegated the arts to the service of a more dominant agenda of transmitting tradition and sacred texts. Schweitzer makes this point and boldly argues there can be no "real art" in service of the church. He writes, "If creativity and imagination are to function only as instruments for the transmission of theological content, the expressive functions are not taken seriously. Creativity and imagination are

then just used in a different context but with the same instrumentalist attitude as rationalism or utilitarianism…Art must be autonomous if it is to be real art" (Schweitzer 2001, 12). For religious educators, Schweitzer's plea challenges his audience to consider how to allow art to be art in an educational context. While he expresses legitimate concern for the autonomy of art, art is never devoid of politics. Furthermore, Wolterstorff would likely argue that art in action is "real art."

Play

Scholars of religious education have tended not to focus on play as a subject of serious inquiry, which mirrors the church's and the larger culture's marginalization of play. Jerome Berryman is perhaps an exception because he argues for "Godly Play," which is the "playing of a game that can awaken us to new ways of seeing ourselves as human beings" (1991, 7). Citing Winnicott, he argues that the spontaneity that takes place in the intermediate area between "me" and the "not me" is critical. In such moments, a learner at play surprises herself with a glimpse of the true self. Echoing Winnicott, Berryman claims that such play allows people to be not only with the true self but with the true selves of others, yet extending Winnicott he argues that such a practice is Godly, leading to spiritual knowledge. I am indebted to Berryman for introducing me to the work of Winnicott and the implications for religious education. In addition, his claim that play leads to spiritual knowing is bold and radical both in terms of epistemology and religious education.

However, Berryman does not discuss object relations theory extensively. Primarily he relegates Godly Play to children's ministry through his examples, though he

acknowledges that Godly Play should be for all. His chapter on adults at play involves adults facilitating Godly Play for children in the church, which reinforces the perception that play is for kids and limits the implications of his work for adult education. Many of Berryman's examples involve art, which is relevant to this project, but again they are limited to children's ministry and not well connected to his initial discussion of Winnicott. Berryman makes no reference to Winnicott's understanding of cultural experiences as an extension of play.

To my knowledge, little work on play has been published in practical theology, except Berryman's work in religious education and a recent volume by Michael Koppel, *Open Hearted Ministry: Play as Key to Pastoral Leadership* (2008). Koppel makes the bold proposal for play as embodied pastoral theology. Defining play, he writes, "Play refers to meaningful thought and behavior—sometimes frivolous, sometimes purposeful—that has pattern to it without being completely pre-described or pre-determined" (Koppel 2008, 5). Koppel appears to be familiar with some of the scholarly literature on play, citing some of the same work as this project such as Winnicott, Gordon Kaufman, and Robert Johnston. However, the author writes for the practical guidance of clergy, advocating a playful approach to the tasks of pastoral ministry such as teaching and pastoral care. When he addresses play in terms of practice, it is in the form of practical suggestions, such as how to do plays (as in drama), implementing a play day, or going to the playground and playing. This work is neither a play theology, nor theology of play, nor a practical theology of play, but it could signal renewed interest in play and practical theology, which could result in more scholarly work.

Mary Elizabeth Moore (2004) provides theological grounding for a practical theology of play in arguing for the sacramental practice of "expecting the [U]nexpected," which requires both a theology and hermeneutic of wonder, which is a key element of play. She discusses how surprise is an important theme of biblical stories, revealing how God relates to humans in unexpected ways, and she argues that the church has practiced expecting the Unexpected through liturgy, for example Advent. Not only does her use of the term *the Unexpected* support my own, Moore points to a bolder, more imaginative and playful approach to sacramental living. Her work has implications for how play might relate to a theology of wonder at God and God's creation, which she traces through the biblical text, the sacraments, and a theological shift that recognizes not only God's transcendence but God's immanence. While Moore does not directly address aesthetics and play, her work represents complimentary edges where this work could be placed side-by-side.

The lack of scholarship on play in adult religious education and practical theology is undoubtedly related to the weak development of theology of play. While theology of play flourished in the late sixties and early seventies as a response to the leisure revolution and the death of God, theological interest in play has sputtered and waned. David Miller's *God and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (1970) reviews well the literature of this prolific period. His review shows that much of the literature in theology of play (at least through the sixties) employs "games" and "play" as theoretical metaphors, exploring religion as play. For example, in *The Master Game: Pathways to Higher Consciousness beyond the Drug Experience* (1968), Robert DeRopp discusses the merits of and instructions for playing the Religion Game, a metagame aimed at salvation.

Allen Watts, author of *Beyond Theology: The Art of Godsmanship* (1964) and *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are* (1966), teaches that joining in the joy of the game of God shows reverence, drawing on the classical Vendanta view that the world is the result of the play of God. From a Roman Catholic perspective, Hugo Rahner wrote *Man at Play*, in which he discusses the "playing of God," "the playing of man," "the playing of the Church," and the "heavenly dance" (1967, 65-66). Rahner calls the scholars to focus on enjoyment and delight, which is God's grace, rather than treating theology as strictly serious. Most of this literature, in which approaches play as metaphor, does not address play as practice. However, I highlight certain volumes that are relevant to artistic play despite this common limitation.

Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Sacred and Profane Beauty: the Holy in Art* (1963), which I mentioned in the review of sources in theological aesthetics, sets a surprising precedent for artistic play. I had not fully appreciated van der Leeuw's contribution to theology of play until I read Miller's argument that van der Leeuw offers a theological aesthetic of play. Discussing dance, drama, visual arts, and music as a "game" and as "the play of men," van der Leeuw uses the metaphor of play as an alternative to an aesthetic that treats art as imitation (1963, 86). Interpreting van der Leeuw, Miller writes, "[P]lay, literally understood [by van der Leeuw], becomes a metaphor for the religious life in which there is a meeting, a covenant, between man [sic] and the Power that lies beyond him. And no where is this paradigmatic spirituality present more than in the "play" of the dancer, the poet, the artist, and the musician. Aesthetics focusing on the category of play becomes a basis for theology" (1970, 89). By addressing art as play and art as spiritual practice, van der Leeuw moves beyond merely thinking about play as a

metaphor for religious life as Miller implies. For van der Leeuw, engaging the play element in art is to encounter the holy, which places van der Leeuw closer to this project's focus than other sources.

A second source of interest is Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Play* (1972), which has been harshly criticized by several play scholars, but contains interesting perspectives on play as imaginative religious practice. Moltmann's implied definition of "to play" is to experience forms of enjoyment that liberate and impart the joy of existence. He discusses "games of liberation," which prepare people for a better future through imaginative experimentation with a new-lifestyle. Like art, these games of liberation "allow us to construct 'anti-environments' and 'counter-environments' to ordinary and human environments and through conscious confrontation of these to open up creative freedom and future alternatives. We are no longer playing with the past in order to escape for a while, but we are increasingly playing with the future in order to get to know it" (Moltmann 1972, 12-13). Through his notion of games of liberation, Moltmann advocates for the transformative dimensions of play, which he likens to the way art works. Grounding his approach to play theologically, he argues for the playfulness of the Creator, the imperative to glorify God by expressing the joy of existence, and recognizing Easter as laughing in the face of death (1972, 17-32). Charging the church to take up the practice of play, Moltman advocates that the church embody the Kingdom of God in the here and now, producing new conditions of leisure that are more liberative (1972, 70).

For Robert Johnston, Moltmann appears to turn play into work, a mission for the church which seems to contradict the very nature of play. However, this view overlooks

how play can be a transformative religious practice that works by its very nature. The great weakness of Moltmann is that he does not illustrate what play as a religious practice would look like, despite his tantalizing overtures. Though he argues the church should experiment with creative freedom, he does not give examples because it inhibits spontaneity (1972, 70). However, the result is that he provides no clear vision of play as a practice—who participates, where it is possible, and how it is engaged on an everyday level.

Another work of the same era, Sam Keen's *Apology for Wonder* (1969) offers insightful discussion about wonder as a mode of perception in play. In his view there is no difference between the experience of wonder and the experience of the holy—all revelatory events are experiences of wonder (Keen 1969, 35). Keen gives a close description of the experience of wonder as an encounter with mystery, which sheds light on how play can lead to spiritual knowing. His thinking about wonder and spiritual knowing supports Moore's work on a theology and hermeneutic of wonder. However, he too does not articulate wonder as a practice in relationship to a context, and he creates a strict dichotomy between work and play. By splitting human existence into *Homo faber*, the Apollonian male way of being that is defined by work, rationality, and elimination of mystery (1969, 146) and *Homo ludens*, the Dionysian female way of being associated with play and chaos, Keen does not account for subtle ways that work and play elements can be part of one another, that is that work can involve play and play can involve work. Although he advocates for a balance between work and play, he reveals his bias toward the Dionysian, which he believes is at the heart of religious impulse. Furthermore, like

Moltmann, Keen's work is partly a response to the nihilism of the 1960s. Both works suffer from simplistic predictions that have turned out to be false.[11]

Published in the same year as Sam Keen's work, Robert Neale's *In Praise of Play* (1969) contains some ideas that provide interesting points of conversation for the case studies. According to Neale, play results from the self's ability to harmonize the need to discharge energy and the need to design experience (1969, 22-24), which would seem to apply especially well to artistic expression. Relevant to this project is Neale's discussion of play as adventure and story as a mode of adventure, since both of the case studies involve storytelling in one form or another. Neale argues religion is full play in the adventure of the sacred, played out in the form of myth and ritual (1969, 121, 126). However, I am unconvinced by Neale's implied judgment of religion as "mature" play, in comparison to his assessment that most of us "play pervertedly and immaturely" (1969, 165). It does not help that he associates play with religiosity without discussion of specific practices or contexts.

In his work, *God and Games* (1970), David Miller builds up to the conclusion that religion is play, taking a metaphoric view of play like many others. For Miller, a *theolgia ludens*, an interpretation of religion as play, "would view God as a player, man [sic] as a player, the church as the community of play, salvation (both now and in the life to come) as play, and morality as *eutropelia* (158)." He writes, "It [theology of play] must not be *about* play; it must also be a theology *of* play, *by* play, and *for* play; it must wittingly

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[11] In the first case, Moltmann writes that the meaning of life will be thrown into question because growing industrialization will free people from work more than ever before (1972, 64). However, leisure (if it has increased at all) is more than ever for those who can afford it. In the second case, Keen (1969) believes that the death of God indicates waning interest in questions of God and the ability of modern people to believe in God, the validity of the Bible, and the uniqueness of Christian revelation. However, there is consensus that religioisity, including Christian faith, is growing especially outside of the mainline churches in the U.S. and in evangelical churches worldwide.

incarnate its content" (1979, 159). As Wenderoth points out, this view confuses two distinct phenomena, which results from too complete of an appropriation (1983, 32). I too am uneasy with the tight overlap that Miller makes, arguing in one chapter that play is religion and in the next that religion is play, which suggests that there is no play outside of religion and visa versa.

However, Miller offers helpful insights about play and meaning-making. In Miller's analysis, play is an emerging mythology, a functioning meaning-system in the sense of Joseph Campbell. According to Miller, the four marks of play are 1) *aisthēsis*, a dimension of the life of play understood as "nonseriousness is the highest seriousness," which represents the spiritual function of play 2) *poiēsis*, a dimension expressed as "fiction is the highest truth, which represents the natural-cosmic function of play, 3) *metamorphōsis*, a dimension that translates to "change is the highest stability, which represents the social-coherence function of play, and 4) *therapia*, represented by the phrase, "purposelessness is the highest purpose," giving play its psychological function (1983, 138-9).[12] Two of these four marks appear to resonate with this project-- *aisthēsis* being the root of the word *aesthetic*, and *poiēsis* having to do with the making of things, including poetry, which derives its meaning from *poiēsis.* As I discussed earlier, Miller's approach to *poiēsis* sheds light on what is artistic play.

Also interesting for this project is Robert Johnston, author of *The Christian at Play* (1983), who attempts to address play as a practice rather than play as a metaphor. Johnston's definition of play is "that activity which is freely and spontaneously entered into, but which, once begun, has its own design, its own rules or order, which must be

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[12] Miller credits Richard A. Underwood, a philosopher of religion at Hartford Seminary Foundation, for his work on the "four marks."

followed so that the play activity may continue" (1983, 34). Notice how Johnston defines play as an activity, which clears him of the pitfalls of arguing religion is play. In a sense, he follows Moltmann in being among the few to address play as practice, though Johnston does not recognize this lineage and is critical of Moltmann's approach. Johnston does better at defining play, though he too does not discuss lived practices of play, referring only to forms of leisure as examples of play. His most helpful contribution is arguing for a Hebraic understanding of play, drawing on the tradition of Sabbath, Hebraic images of God as playful creator, and a tradition of enjoyment and fulfillment of life, citing practices of the Jewish community (1983, 88-89, 92, 95, 114). According to Johnston, play should be balanced with fulfilling work, given its own integrity apart from play. While Johnston appears to agree with Keen on this point, Johnston avoids Keen's sharp dichotomization between work and play.

The four fields of study closest to this project—practical theology, religious education, theology of play, theological aesthetics—have addressed art and play as separate topics with varying degrees of interest over the last 50 years. Side-by-side, these discussions reveal how little theoretical work has been done in the intersection of art and play for adults. Most of the work I have reviewed reflects a traditional privileging of theory in the study of art or play, for example exploring the play as a metaphor rather than as a practice. In contrast, this project is part of a growing trend to study religious and spiritual practices, which is likely to build upon or challenge theoretical understandings of the past. I move now to exploring two case studies of artistic play, which fills in some gaps in the academic literature, where the synthetic relationship between art and play as practice has yet to be fully explored.

Chapter 3
Japanese American Liturgical Art

This chapter presents the context for the case study on artistic play in a Japanese American church and family, which is relevant for this chapter and the next. In what follows, I explore liturgical art created or procured by my mother, Naomi Takahashi Goto, for the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC) in Sacramento, California (See Appendix A and B).

The late theologian David Ng notes that Asian North American Christian worship tends to be dominated by Western styles and patterns of worship. When hymns are sung in the native Asian language, they are usually sung to Western hymn tunes. Similarly, while some symbolic artifacts such as silk banners reflect Asian expressions, there are more often traditional Western symbols, styles of art, and chancel furnishings in Asian North American sanctuaries (Ng 1996, xxiii-xxiv). According to Ng, this is evidence of Asian North American Christians' efforts to assimilate and to avoid "pagan ways." When Ng was writing in 1996, Asian North American congregations were beginning to search for Asian forms and patterns of worship. For example, Ng notices the appearance of some art in the Chinese, Japanese, or Korean traditions as well as Korean North American choirs and congregations creating their own musical style and tradition (1996, xxiv). This suggests that Mom is not alone in her interest in incorporating Japanese artifacts, history, and aesthetics into the worship setting of SJUMC.

For over twenty years, Mom has been responsible for visuals at SJUMC. She has created, purchased, or commissioned art on behalf of the church to be used and/or seen in the context of the sanctuary and narthex. Her unofficial job started when Rev. Gary

Barbaree (SJUMC pastor from 1985-91), recruited Mom to create visual art for the church. Interested in reflecting Japanese American heritage in the worship experience, she began to incorporate Japanese artifacts and aesthetics. Her interest in strengthening Japanese American identity and culture stemmed from (1) a recognition that the denominational resources for education and worship did not address racial/ethnic minority church concerns,[1] and (2) her experience as a young mother in the late 1960s, when she and my father lived in Columbus, Ohio, where there were few people of Japanese descent (Goto 2008a). They moved back to California to raise a family, so that their children would grow up in a Japanese American community and appreciate their culture. Years later, Mom creates or procures Japanese-influenced art for the church because she recognizes with every generation the congregation grows less aware of its Japanese heritage.

One might think that Mom's concern about the waning sense of Japanese American identity at the church reflects a nostalgic, unrealistic desire to cling to the past. However, Mom's art is better understood as an attempt to construct identity in light of how Japanese American Christianity has been historically racialized in this country. In pre- and postwar America, Japanese American Protestants were unable to bridge the gap created by race despite sharing the religious tradition of the dominant culture. David Yoo argues, "Although the prevailing assumption is that racial-ethnic Christians are more assimilated than their non-Christian counterparts, Japanese American Protestants consciously forged religious identities and organizations in opposition to the discrimination they experienced. Whether Buddhist or Christian, Japanese Americans

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[1] While all people have race and ethnicity, I use the term *racial/ethnic minority* to discuss people who do not belong to the dominant racial and ethnic group in the United States, namely people who are not of European descent.

experienced racialized religion" (Yoo 2002, 122). Yoo goes on to point out that Japanese American leaders in 1910 founded the Northern California Japanese Christian Federation (NCJCCF) "to keep up the morale of the community due to incidents of racial prejudice and persecution and business, school and work" (Yoo 2002, 131). Given this history, addressing race, racism, and faith through art is relevant for SJUMC, as members of the congregation explore identity in the face of a changing sense of "us" and "them," with the church becoming more racially and culturally integrated with the dominant culture.

SJUMC Context

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Sacramento, California, was a growing center for Japanese immigration. The "Florin District," now a suburb of Sacramento, where one of the predecessor churches of SJUMC was located before the merger, was one of the largest Japanese colonies in independent farming and a strong regional center for the grape and strawberry industry prior to World War II. At that time, Christian (and Buddhist) churches were important social centers, providing a variety of functions for the Japanese community. Two of those churches, which eventually merged to form SJUMC, were the Pioneer Methodist Church of Sacramento and the Florin Japanese Methodist Church, two congregations founded by *issei* (first generation Japanese immigrants who came to the U.S.)[2]

During World War II, the Japanese American community was dispersed and incarcerated through Executive Order 9066, which uprooted over 120,000 Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent and confined them to internment camps without due

[2] I use the terms *issei*, *nisei*, and *sansei*. As the progeny of the *issei*, the *nisei* are the second generation to be born in the U.S., *sansei* are the third generation, and *yonsei* the fourth.

process for up to four years. Not only did families lose property, farms, and businesses, the Florin District, for example, never recovered its former population or pre-war prominence in agriculture (Maeda 2000, 111). Members of the Pioneer and Florin churches, who were also scattered and interned, either never returned to the area or had to rebuild their lives and churches. The two churches merged in 1968, establishing a new church called Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church, located a few miles from Florin, on a four-acre site donated by the dispersed Merwin Memorial United Methodist Church. The new sanctuary and social hall of SJUMC was built in 1970, followed by the construction of a garden courtyard, which was dedicated in 1972.

Today, the *issei* pioneers who established the first Christian churches in Sacramento are gone, and SJUMC is experiencing the passing of the *nisei* generation, who are now in their 70s and older, while the *sansei* are raising families of their own. While racism forced the *issei* generation to rely on Japanese American churches and other social institutions to provide for their needs, later generations have shifted away from them as they have gained greater access to institutions of the dominant culture. According to Paul Spickard (1996), the decreasing connection to Japanese American social institutions among the *sansei* has been a continuation of *nisei* trends. For example, *nisei* were more likely than their parents to live in non-Japanese neighborhoods and to interact socially with non-Japanese Americans. With a similar drive to achieve, the *sansei* have been more likely than their parents to take jobs that would take them outside the Japanese American community.

SJUMC is like other Japanese American institutions that have been transformed demographically by high rates of marriage to people outside the Japanese American

community and modest rates of immigration from Japan.[3] In 1990, the proportion of intermarried Japanese Americans climbed to over 40 percent. According to demographers Larry Shinagawa and Gin Yong Pang, who published their findings in 1990 and 1996, about three-quarters of young, U.S.-born Japanese American adults were married to non-Japanese. While 70 percent of the total Japanese American population is entirely Japanese, over 30 percent are partially Japanese (Lai 2003, 77).

A recent debate at SJUMC about whether to drop the word *Japanese* from the name of the church epitomizes the ongoing struggle to embrace a multicultural present and future while honoring the past. Of the historic Japanese American United Methodist churches, SJUMC is the only one that retains the word *Japanese* in its name (Barbaree 2008).[4] Though it has never been put to a vote among members of the congregation, it has been discussed in both formal and informal conversations. In my interviews, three out of fifteen interviewed about this issue would vote to drop the word *Japanese*, nine would keep it, one was undecided, and two would change the church's name to reflect the church's Japanese heritage without using the word *Japanese* (Hanaoka 2008).[5] Those who would drop the word *Japanese* from the church name feel that the current name is too exclusive and therefore un-Christian, especially given the growing multicultural

[3] Unlike European immigration, Asian immigration was restricted in 1924 by legislation that barred immigration by "aliens ineligible to citizenship," which deliberately targeted the Japanese who had not been kept out by earlier anti-Asian immigration laws (Lai 2003, 75). The greatest concentration of Japanese immigration took place prior to World War II. Today, immigration from Japan is comparable to immigration rates from Western Europe.

[4] According to Rev. Gary Barbaree, around the time of the SJUMC merger in 1968 there was a trend to drop the word *Japanese* from the names of Japanese American churches, however in this newly merged SMUMC there was a sense that someone needed to keep the name and affirm the Japanese heritage of the church.

[5] Rev. Nobu Hanaoka proposed dropping the word *Japanese* from the church name and including a Japanese word, like the word *nozomi* (hope) or *megumi* (grace), which would allow the church to reference its heritage without alienating anyone. The proposal was never widely accepted.

membership of the church. Others feel strongly that the church should keep its current name out of respect for tradition, history, and the *issei* pioneers.

According to Rev. Gary Barbaree (SJUMC pastor from 1985-91), historically SJUMC has provided a place for people to learn how to be Japanese American. He argues that as a merger of two Japanese congregations that chose each other because of their common heritage, learning be Japanese American has always been part of the church's agenda (Barbaree 2008). According to Hirochika Nakamaki (1983), who conducted a study of Japanese Christian churches in Sacramento, the Japanese minister and the *issei* of the Florin Japanese Methodist Church were in favor of merging with the Florin Methodist Church, which was a European American congregation. However, the *nisei* members blocked the merger, pointing out examples of failed interracial mergers and insisted that if there was to be a merger it should be with the (Pioneer) Japanese Methodist Church of Sacramento, which eventually happened in 1968 (Nakamaki 1983, 275).

There is support for Rev. Barbaree's assertion in that SJUMC has a long history of hosting events and activities to celebrate and educate the community about Japanese American heritage, often through the arts. For many years, the church has organized an annual "oriental bazaar" that has featured Japanese music such as *taiko* (drumming), Japanese *bonsai*, *ikebana* (flower arrangement) displays, and Japanese tea ceremony demonstrations. Rev. George Nishikawa (Pastor Emeritus of SJUMC, 2001 to present) notes that the number historic Japanese American churches holding bazaars of this type are dwindling, mostly because of the work involved and the weak financial return (Nishikawa 2008). In addition to having the church bazaar, since 1978 SJUMC has been

the host site for Jan Ken Po Gakko, a summer program dedicated to teaching children of Japanese descent about their cultural heritage through language, games, and the arts.

At times the church's commitment to teaching members how to be Japanese American has been expressed through its religious education. When Rev. Nobu Hanaoka was pastor (1999-2001 and 2003-06), members of the congregation, including Mom, asked him to teach an eight-month series on Japanese culture and values. Born and raised in Japan but educated in the United States, Rev. Hanaoka was well-equipped to help members of the congregation understand their Japanese heritage as Christians. He said,

> I have to confess to you that I didn't really see the need for it [the class] at the beginning because I assumed that they [the members of SJUMC] were culturally integrated already in the American mainstream culture, and yet…especially in Sacramento the *niseis* are still struggling with the discrepancy between their heartfelt [cultural] values and the accepted Protestant values. I realized how important it was for them to make sense of having two values systems within them, not having been given a chance to assess their own values [as Japanese] as well as American cultural values (Hanaoka 2008).

For those taking the class on Japanese culture and values, Rev. Hanaoka helped to provide a missing link between faith and culture, which is the function that Asian American churches like SJUMC historically perform. According to theologian Fumitaka Matsuoka, "For Asian American Christians the church is the place of our quest to meet the longing of our hearts. In our quest we are met by nothing less than the grace of the One who restores us to our authentic human selves" (Matsuoka 1995, 14). For members of SJUMC, this has involved identifying Japanese values that they have inherited, often unknowingly, and reconciling this knowledge with Christian values.

In summary, Mom's use of Japanese-influenced art in worship has been welcomed, appreciated, and understood in part because of the church's past. Because teaching people to be Japanese American has been historically part of the church's

mission, her art has been well-received by the congregation. Mom's artistic play has also been facilitated partly by the good will of past and present clergy who have promoted the recovery of Japanese culture and Japanese American identity.

Mom's artistic play as it relates to this study is an inextricable weaving of our family history, her life experience, the history of SJUMC, and the internment of the Japanese American community. Though one could start with any one of these areas to discuss her liturgical art, to omit the private in favor of the public would obscure how they are intimately related. In the remainder of the chapter, I present two examples of Mom's art, each time identifying a "play form" involved. To make this clear, I illustrate the form of play Mom facilitated in my family's life before discussing it in the context of liturgy. In every "play form" Mom invites the player to do something in response to the art, a task that engages the player's imagination and hooks him/her into play. These examples are Mom's response to how artistic play allows people to seek the God of the Unexpected.

For Mom's art, my data involves interviews with thirteen lay members of SJUMC, four clergy, and Mom herself for a total of eighteen people.[6] Of the thirteen lay members of SJUMC, all are long time members of the church—members for over twenty-five years or their entire lives for interviewees under twenty-five. All are full Japanese by descent, except one who is half Japanese. Only two of the thirteen people speak Japanese fluently, while the others speak little or no Japanese. In gender, four are men and nine are women. In age, five are in their late teens to thirties, six people are in their forties to sixties, and two are in their seventies and eighties. Of the past and present

[6] The case study of artistic play in a Japanese American church and family, which I discuss in this chapter and the next, involves interviews with a total of twenty-six people. I interviewed eight additional people for data on the next chapter.

clergy interviewed, two are European American and two are Japanese American. All eighteen interviewees (lay and clergy) have an upper middle class background. A well-educated group, thirteen of the eighteen people I interviewed hold a bachelor's or master's degree, with an additional four having completed some college.[7] Except in one case, I was acquainted with the people I interviewed, sometimes having a longtime personal or family connection with them. In a few cases, I reference people as "Uncle" and "Auntie," which indicate fictive kin. It is customary in my culture to use such titles to show respect to elders, for example those who are friends of my parents.

The *Pottery of Tears*

SJUMC's communion ware is called the *Pottery of Tears*. It was Mom's vision to commission Anthony Maki Gill, a local artist from Placer County, California, to sculpt a communion set from the pumice and soil of Tule Lake, California; Rowher, Arkansas; and Jerome, Arkansas—former sites of three camps that incarcerated Japanese Americans during World War II, including many church members.[8,9] The two chalices, paten, and flagon are free form, rough and imperfect (See Appendix G). Inscribed on the stems of the chalices are words such as *citizen*, *injustice*, and *American*. My parents commissioned the art, donated it to the church, and it was consecrated in 2004. Until

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[7] One interviewee's level of education is unknown.

[8] The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, contributed in part to the United States government's declaration of war against Axis nations in World War II, and it helped to build a political climate of wartime hysteria and racism against Japanese Americans. In 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the War Department to place all people of Japanese ancestry residing on the West Coast in detention camps without due process, relocating some 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were American citizens. Given only days to sell or store their possessions, many Japanese Americans lost businesses and property, only able to bring what they could carry.

[9] In 2004, Mom had seen Gill's exhibit of *Tear Cups* at Sierra College in Rocklin, California. Gill and his students made a cup to represent each Japanese American in Placer County who was interned, as part of a local oral history project on Japanese Americans. The chalices that Gill made for the church are "tear cups" with a stem. Because the set includes chalices, paten, and flagon, I named them the *Pottery of Tears.*

then, the church had never had in its liturgy an embodied metaphor that referenced the internment of the community, its decimation, and the suffering of those who were forced to rebuild their lives.

To illustrate how the *Pottery of Tears* engages the congregation in artistic play, I first explore the play form on which it is based, something I call "What Is It?"

What Is It?

To illustrate this play form, I invite you to participate in a bit of artistic play, as Mom recently engaged me. Handing me an object, she asked "What is it?" Look at Appendix C and decide what you think it is. Note that its appeal stems from being an art object full of texture and expertly carved, and its ambiguity demands artistic intelligence to interpret. By now you may realize that this play form engages the imagination, but it also evokes narrative and creates community. Now turn to Appendix D to see if you guessed correctly. Of course, revealing the object begs the question, "What's the story?" This invites me to respond by telling you how Mom bought this artifact in Japan from a little old man who carved it, how her friends had a hard time guessing what it was, or why I was able to guess it correctly when we played together.[10] In any case, in "What Is It?" the participants play with the tension of being an insider/outsider, which creates a relationship between people. When you were trying to decide what the object was, you were an outsider, but you have become an insider now that you know the "secret" of the object and the story behind it.

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[10] Knowing that Mom loves the unexpected gave me an advantage. I knew the object's purpose had to be clever—otherwise she would not have bought it. For her playing "What is It?" is always a test of the imagination.

If you felt stimulated by the chopsticks rests, then you have experienced what Sam Keen calls wonder, which is a mode of perception in play. According to Keen, when a person encounters an object of wonder, he or she experiences surprise and puzzlement or ambivalence because the object comes without bearing its own explanation for being. Disrupting human ways of coping with the world, wonder results in what Keen calls a "cognitive crucifixion," which forces a person to cease imposing pre-determined categories and to surrender to the object (1969, 30-31). The novelty of an object of wonder fascinates, provokes a sense of admiration for the object, and invites a celebration the object's intrinsic value. It involves the viewer in a loving relationship, so that the viewer cannot totally separate him/herself from the object. While the urge to respond with curiosity and explanation is natural, Keen points to contemplation as an alternate response. Instead of giving in to the urge to categorize, one could learn instead to allow the object to speak and to create new categories in a "resurrection of meaning." Contemplation would allow the object to be a presence that presents a gift of meaning (Keen 1969, 26-7).

Through two stories, I illustrate how "What Is It?" can contribute to the development of self. When I was in high school, each morning Mom stood at the sink, quietly carving a secret message in the rind of an orange, which she packed in my lunch bag. As a variation of, "What Is It?" this play form was "What Does it Say?" Turn to Appendix E to see if you can interpret the message that spirals the orange. Over the years, she carved dozens of "talking oranges," and I became known for them in the lunch yard. Friends would come and ask, "What does the orange say?" And they would try decoding the message. This would not have been artistic play if the messages were

written on paper—for instance, my peers would not have asked to read a private note from my mother.[11] However, in Mom's hands an ordinary orange was transformed into something unexpectedly artful, just as the Japanese carver turned a common stick into useful beauty. As art, the orange became not only engaging but somehow more public in that way that art is communal, even if the message of the orange was intensely personal.

In my junior year of high school, I was invited to California Girls' State. Sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary, the week-long event gathers approximately 500 girls from all over the state to learn about civics by participating in simulated local, county, and state elections. Moping at the prospect of being trapped with all girls for a week, I reluctantly attended, but a care package from Mom lifted my spirits. When I opened the envelope, I asked myself, "What is it?" (Look at Appendix F and guess what it is.) There were three of them, which said together, "A hug a day, to share or wear, to be used as needed when needed." Of course the message was meaningful to me because it was from Mom, but like the oranges what made it artistic play was the form of the message. In my teenage mind, it was so cool I decided to wear a paper hug around my neck as I campaigned for Governor, which to my surprise facilitated interactions with people, who asked "What is it?" For a less-than-popular introvert who had never run for a school office, engaging people in play was extremely helpful. In fact, it probably helped me win the election. Capturing the imaginations of my peers, the paper hug became their means of relating to me. When I won the election, my "town" (the girls in my wing of the dorm) made a paper hug, copied after Mom's and signed with notes of support and friendship.

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[11] The talking orange in Appendix E says, "Hitch a wagon to a star, my precious."

I tell these stories to reveal what artistic play taught a teenager struggling to find her sense of self. From an object relations perspective, talking oranges and paper hugs were transitional objects, which contributed to growth from dependence to independence, in the formation of identity, and the self's attempt to relate to others in the external world. While object relations theory begins with interactions between mother and infant, Winnicott (1971) argues that the creation and destruction of transitional objects continue into adulthood, intensifying especially in the teenage years. Winnicott would say, for example, that I created in the paper hug a transitional object that allowed me to recreate my absent mother when I was feeling homesick. Paradoxically, the paper hug as object mother was "mine" and therefore me, yet it was simultaneously not really her and therefore not me. In this intermediate space (the "me" and the "not-me"), a new sense of my self emerged as the space allowed for a creative spontaneity (e.g., deciding to wear the paper hug in public) that raised awareness about my identity.

During the week, play with the transitional object was in the form of engaging my peers in the illusion that the paper hug was a real one. The fact that my peers constructed and gave me a paper hug was evidence that they were playing with me. Winnicott's theory leads me to conclude that my self imbued the paper hug with personal meaning, joining both fact and imagination. But at the end of the week, the paper hug lost its magic and was folded away into a scrapbook. Returning to my real mother, I could "destroy" the object mother because it was no longer needed. From then on, I had confidence that I could create community and succeed wherever I went, even in places where I knew no one.

In summary, "What Is It?" is a play form that creates an encounter with an art object that provokes a sense of wonder, elicits narrative, and creates community. However, "What Is It?" can also call forth deep meanings, sometimes enabling the art object to become a transitional object that helps to reveal a new sense of self. A variation of "What Is it?" is "What's the Story?" which is the play form involving the *Pottery of Tears*.

What's the Story: Remembering the Dismembered

Most of the time people fail to notice communion vessels, which are typically made from silver, gold-plating, or ceramic—their shape smooth, symmetrical, and perfect. In commissioning the *Pottery of Tears*, Mom wanted people to be confronted by the unexpectedness of its form, to provoke their artistic intelligence, and to ask "What's the Story?" Most of the time, the *Pottery of Tears* goes unexplained in the communion liturgy at SJUMC, though sometimes an explanation is included in the church bulletin or is made by pastor. As aesthetic objects, the chalices, paten, and flagon present themselves for investigation, but it is always the individual's decision to ask, "What's the Story?" As I said above, like all play artistic play involves freedom. If I choose not to play, the *Pottery of Tears* poses no threat, but if I choose to ask, "What's the Story?" it is possible that my family and community's terrifying memories will flow. The *Pottery of Tears* tells of the sorrows of a people exiled by Executive Order 9066 and the suffering of the Japanese American community.

If a person chooses to ask "What's the Story?" they open themselves to the possibility of wonder—wonder at why the *Pottery of Tears* has the appearance that it

does, as well as wonder at the possible relationship between Christ's suffering and the Japanese American community's suffering. According to Sam Keen, who attributes wonder to play, there is no difference between the experience of wonder and the experience of the holy.[12] He argues that such experiences provoke awe and fascination, providing a point of (re)orientation and serving as a (re)organizing principle that gives life meaning and unity Keen (1969, 38). In conducting my interviews, I wanted to know if and how the *Pottery of Tears* reoriented people's experience of communion and self-understanding.

It is likely that I affected church members' understanding of the *Pottery of Tears* before I arrived in the field, since I named the *Pottery of Tears*. Several years before Mom's art became part of this project, I wrote a theological interpretation that was read to congregation and later published in the United Methodist magazine, the *Interpreter*. In my framing of the *Pottery of Tears*, I wrote, "In using the *Pottery of Tears*, we bring to God's table memories of our community's suffering in an unjust land, our struggle for dignity, and our fight for justice. Remembering our past is an act of healing, an act of gratitude for the strength of those who have gone before, and an act of resolve that such injustice can never be allowed again" (Church dedicates communion set made from internment camp soil [2005], 12). This research gave me the opportunity to test some of my assumptions in that framing.

I find it helpful to reflect on receiving communion with the *Pottery of Tears* as an experience of "remembering the dismembered," a term Mary Elizabeth Moore borrows from Jong Chun Park. According to Moore, remembering the dismembered is an "aspect

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[12] I agree with Keen that wonder is an experience of the holy, but the holy can also provoke other emotions such as humility, fear, or reverence.

of sacramental teaching [that] mediates the memory of God's suffering with hurts of creation and links Jesus' death upon the cross with the continuing presence of the suffering world" (2004, 66). Though Moore does not discuss the use of art objects in remembering the dismembered, her work inspires me to consider the possibility that receiving communion with the *Pottery of Tears* is an experience in "the release of terrifying memories," in this case the internment experience (Moore 2004, 67). Citing Park's work in Korean theology, Moore argues for the importance of inscribing tragedies of the past in people's memories, which allows them to integrate unspeakable pain into the whole of life. Prior to my interviews, I hypothesized that being invited to bring to God's table memories of the community's suffering was liberative and/or healing. Church members' responses to the *Pottery of Tears* were more complex than I had anticipated.

George, a *nisei* who was interned, reported that the *Pottery of Tears* brings up no memories for him, though the story behind the communion set makes it special in terms of historical significance. Sue, a *sansei* who was interned as a child with her family, felt that the *Pottery of Tears* is not meaningful to her personally, though she thinks that making the communion set from the soil of internment camps is a "good idea." In both cases, the form of the communion vessels makes little or no difference in the experience of the Eucharist, rather the act of communion and Christ's sacrifice for humanity are primary. For these members, the cultural implications of the *Pottery of Tears* are perhaps an added bonus but not integral to the meaning of the Eucharist.

For all others interviewed, the *Pottery of Tears* evokes memories of their own or their family members' internment and the sacrifices that were made for generations that

have followed. "Auntie" May, who was interned with her family, said, "It means a lot to us to use it [the *Pottery of Tears*] for the Eucharist. Every time you see it, you think not only of internment but the sacrifices that so many people have made and of course the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It's a beautiful set, just artistically speaking. But when you think of what went into it, it just means more. It's just beautiful" (May 2008). According to "Auntie" May, receiving communion with the *Pottery of Tears* is an opportunity for healing wounds of the internment.

For others, the *Pottery of Tears* evokes memories that connect them to the past without the explicit reference to Christ. For example, when he sees the *Pottery of Tears*, *sansei* Alex remembers his parents and grandparents who were interned and the hardships they endured during internment and rebuilding their lives in the postwar years. He said, "[T]o have this communion ware [is important] and I would support other things that tell the story of what happened during that generation because I think it's a story that is not told enough and that history—we're going to lose it if we don't capture it" (Alex 2008). The interviews reveal a possible spectrum of responses to the *Pottery of Tears*—on one end those who disconnect culture from the experience of communion (George and Sue), in the middle those who experience a strong connection between faith and culture ("Auntie" May), and the other those who mostly experience a sense of cultural identity (Alex).[13]

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[13] I am uncertain whether there are church members who only think of the cultural implications of the *Pottery of Tears* when they take communion. It is possible that those who failed to mention Christ in explaining the significance of the *Pottery of Tears* were taking the traditional understanding of communion for granted and only expounding on what was new (i.e., the overlay of the community's story.) Or my phrasing of questions may have influenced people's responses. I asked, "When you saw the *Pottery of Tears* for the first time, what did you think? Did it bring up a feeling, memory, or story?" The latter question might have caused interviewees to think more in personal, rather than theological terms.

For some interviewees, the *Pottery of Tears* seems to allow them to integrate the unspeakable pain of the internment experience into the whole of life, as Moore describes remembering the dismembered. According to "Auntie" May, the *Pottery of Tears* teaches forgiveness, tolerance, and the power to overcome adversity. The communion ware makes her think, not only of Christ whose resurrection brings hope, but of her parents who never condemned the U.S. for their incarceration. By example, her parents taught her "[Y]ou don't keep going back. You learn from this experience and you hope that others will learn from it" (May 2008). For "Auntie" May, this means refusing to allow the past to embitter her.

Though born a generation later, *sansei* Masako, whose father and paternal grandparents were interned, also interpreted how the *Pottery of Tears* helps her to integrate the painful memories of the past with the whole of life. When she first saw the communion set, she wondered, "Why would they want to create something from such a sad time in history?" However, she later realized the *Pottery of Tears* was about "letting go, forgiveness, and…taking something that was probably not a happy time and creating something beautiful from that and something practical from that." For Masako (2008), the idea of creating something anew is also the symbolism of communion because "you're being washed again."

Church members' views like those of "Auntie" May and Masako, which reconcile the community's historic pain and suffering with hope and healing, are echoed by clergy.[14] Rev. Nishikawa believes that the *Pottery of Tears* evokes not only memories about internment but "a deep appreciation for what has taken place both good and bad."

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[14] In 2005, tear cup chalices were presented to two retired Japanese American bishops and other Asian American United Methodist clergy leaders, which suggests a wider recognition of the symbolic meaning of the *Pottery of Tears*.

He said, "It's hard to say internment camp was good, but a lot of good has come from a lot of things. Interment camp and the dirt that was used for the communion ware brings it much closer in terms of the Lord's Table" (Nishikawa 2008).

To ask "What's the Story?" of the *Pottery of Tears* is to participate in artistic play that leads to a reorientation of communion, in which the community's suffering is placed in relationship with Christ's suffering. Most people I interviewed appeared to have had an experience that resembles remembering the dismembered for the sake of communal and individual healing. Having discussed what is accomplished as people ask and respond to "What's the Story?" I now move more deeply into the question of how—how the *Pottery of Tears* draws people into artistic play. I address this in the next three sections, beginning with thinking of the *Pottery of Tears* as a transitional object in general, followed by greater specificity of how it functions.

Pottery of Tears as a Transitional Object

Like Mom's talking oranges and paper hugs, the *Pottery of Tears* is a transitional object that calls forth deep meanings that are transformative, a process made all the more powerful for pre-existing reasons. First, because of their race, the church members are in a liminal state, which means they already exist in an in-between world similar to what Winnicott describes. Second, because the sanctuary itself is a liminal and transitional space, artistic play takes place in a supportive frame. And third, because Christ is a transitional object himself, the *Pottery of Tears* resonates on the level of religious symbol and object relations. For all these reasons, when people encounter the *Pottery of Tears*, people are drawn to ask and respond to "What's the Story?"

As I discussed in the Introduction, Japanese Americans (like other Asian Americans) are a liminal people. The notion of liminality is a key theme in Asian American theological and religious studies. Fumitaka Matsuoka writes,

> [W]e Asian-Americans find ourselves in a liminal world that is cultural and linguistic, as well as cross-generational, in character. A liminal world is the "place of in-betweenness." It is at once the world of isolation and intimacy, desolation and creativity. A person in a liminal world is poised in uncertainty and ambiguity between two or more social constructs, reflecting in the soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions. One of the constructs is likely to be dominant, whether cultural or linguistic. Within such a dominant construct one strives to belong and yet finds oneself to be a peripheral member, forced remain in the world of in-betweenness. (Fumitaka Matsuoka, 1995. *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches*. [Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995], 54)

Matsuoka does not address transitional spaces, yet his concept of liminality overlaps with Winnicott. Both refer to an in-between space, characterized by ambiguity, contradiction, and tension. For example, Matsuoka refers to a world marked by "isolation and intimacy," "discords and harmonies," as well as "repulsions and attractions," which sound similar to the tensions of the me/not-me split. In any case, Japanese Americans already exist in a liminal space, which one could easily imagine shifting (or perhaps even adding to) to a transitional space created by artistic play.

The sanctuary, where communion is typically performed, is a second factor that likely contributes to the powerful draw of "What's the Story?" The sanctuary reflects the liminality of the congregation in its physical characteristics. *Nisei* Wayne Osaki, the San Francisco architect who designed the church sanctuary and social hall at the time of the merger, wanted the church to reflect both the Japanese and American identity of the congregation, therefore he combined materials, colors, and textures that were evocative of Japanese aesthetics (e.g., wood, dark brown/white) with contemporary American

design. According to "Uncle" Wayne, his generation of Japanese Americans was ashamed of being Japanese, therefore he wanted to build a church that would inspire members to appreciate their heritage (Osaki 2008). SJUMC (and other Japanese American churches designed by Wayne Osaki) are also transitional in the sense that the buildings are in a state of in-betweenness—somewhere between what the architect had in mind when he built the church and how the congregation has changed his design to meet their present and future tastes and needs.[15] As far as the *Pottery of Tears* is concerned, the sanctuary provides an aesthetic that resonates with and supports the transitional phenomena happening in the space.

Receiving communion with the *Pottery of Tears* might seem far removed from Winnicott's theories on infants and mothers, however he believed that play with transitional objects that begins in the earliest stages of life continues in adulthood through the form of cultural activities, including religion.

> The extraordinary thing about Winnicott's account of play is that it connects the world of infantile experience with the world of sophisticated cultural production in a way that, although modestly phrased, is in fact radical and far-reaching…Later forms of playfulness [in life] found their earliest prototype in a play of mind, a shape-changing capacity, a relish for antagonism, a future-directed, speculative power of invention, that seemed to belong to infant experience from the beginning. But if Winnicott's "potential space" looks back to the primitive condition of minds, it looks forward too to minds in their most elaborately cultivated forms….What could be claimed for the mother-baby relationship—that it involved a perpetual "to and fro" (p. 55), a lasting playground of in-betweenness—could be claimed also for the art work in production and for the artwork being granted, or looked at, or heard. (Malcom Bowie, "Psychoanalysis and Art: The Winnicott Legacy." In *Art, Creativity, Living*, edited by L. Caldwell. [London: Karnac Books, 2001], 15-16)

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[15] For example, a committee at SJUMC voted to change the building's exterior trim color from brown to purple, and some felt that this change detracted from the Japanese aesthetic of the original building. One of the distinctive features of the Japanese American churches that Wayne Osaki designed is a decorative wood "fencing," painted in dark brown against the white background of the building. In SJUMC's latest repainting, the fencing was masked in white. "Uncle" Wayne admitted that he hardly recognized the church exterior in recent photos. Changes in the architectural details reflect the ongoing tension of aesthetics between what is more Japanese and what is American (or something less Japanese).

In the passage above, Bowie argues that art engages adults in a play of the mind that mirrors the infant's earliest to-and-fro play with tensions, including the illusion of oneness and the reality of separation, as well as the desire to create and destroy what has been created. In the case of the *Pottery of Tears*, the art (which is helpfully framed by the liminal space of the sanctuary) functions as a transitional object.

The *Pottery of Tears* holds the body and blood of Christ, who himself is a transitional object. Scholars such as Brooke Hopkins (2003) and Ann Ulanov (2001) argue that the body and blood of Christ are consumed in a way that reenacts the infant's incorporation of the mother though the breast (Hopkins 2003, 258). Just as the mother is not destroyed, so too Christians believe Christ lives beyond crucifixion. According to Ulanov, if through the Eucharist believers learn again and again that humanity can "destroy Christ" yet he still lives, believers come to know God's unconditional acceptance. This God "takes the worst we can hurl at Jesus," who takes into his own body human aggression, "is not destroyed, and then comes back in the body to tell us so" (Ulanov 2001, 52). For Ulanov, this demonstrates that this God wants people's full selves, not only their love but their destructiveness, which such fullness must include.

Any communion set could be a transitional object in the way I just described, however the *Pottery of Tears* also has the additional layer of communal memory and reference to internment. Many church members feel that they are honoring those who were interned when they take communion with the *Pottery of Tears*. When they partake the elements, they taste the suffering of the community and make it part of themselves, like the infant incorporating the mother through the breast. The *Pottery of Tears* awakens memories related to internment, vivifying, and making meaningful the *Pottery of Tears* in

a way similar to the way a teddy bear becomes “real.” However, when members of the congregation *use* the *Pottery of Tears*, not only functionally as a communion set but also by tasting and incorporating the community’s suffering into themselves, the *Pottery of Tears* is “destroyed,” but of course in reality, it too “survives.” Even with this additional layer of communal memory, the *Pottery of Tears* evokes a new God image, that of a God who literally and figuratively shares the cup of suffering with the Japanese American community. This new image of God might help people to imagine God’s presence with those who were interned and ponder how this same God manifests in the present community of faith.

As a transitional object the *Pottery of Tears* allows me the space to play with multiple identities having to do with faith and cultural identity—the sinful me and the redeemed me, the community’s suffering and my own, the wounded me and the healed me, the Japanese me and the American me. Rev. Barbaree believes that play (and I think he would agree, play of this kind) is appropriate at church, which he sees as a playhouse where Christians play at the Kingdom of Heaven. He calls this “play work,” in that worship begins and ends with a prelude and postlude (from *ludens* meaning “play”) with liturgy (from *lei tur gia* meaning “it worked!”) in between (Barbaree 2008). Similarly, Romano Guardini argues that liturgy is play that teaches not by inculcating a set of conscious lessons, but by creating a playground--“a universe brimming with fruitful spiritual life, and allows the soul to wander about in it at will and to develop itself there” (1998, 66).

In Rev. Barbaree’s assessment, church is a chance to play with the “really scary, deep, religious/spiritual things that we deal with—the huge things that are life.” He calls

this a sandbox, a playground where there are people watching so that no one gets hurt. However, while church members are in this sandbox, they are "explicitly playing around with issues of life and death and transformation, coming and going and justice and mercy and forgiveness and redemption and sin—all of those things" (Barbaree 2008).[16] According to Rev. Barbaree, the sacramental utensils are toys for Christians to play and practice with. Just as a little boy learns with a toy hammer how to use it safely, so too "the bread that we eat is a toy body. The cup that we drink is toy blood. And what we hope happens to us is that when the time comes that we deal with real flesh and blood during the week, we've had some experience with that already" (Barbaree 2008). Rev. Barbaree wishes that people did not stop playing with toys when they became adults. Church is the only place Rev. Barbaree knows where adults can play with toys, and he wishes that there were more places people could deal with the scariest things in life. (InterPlay is another place.)

Form and Content

Beyond the fact that *Pottery of Tears* is a transitional object, its power to draw people into artistic play is due to the match between its form and content, which appeals to people's artistic intelligence. Recall how, in the case of the talking oranges and paper hugs, people were irresistibly drawn into play with me because of the intriguing match between form and content.

As I said, the *Pottery of Tears* looks and feels different than any other communion set, creating something no other can, something mysterious. Rev. Gary Grundman

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[16] Don Saliers (2005) makes a related argument about liturgy helping people to face the beauty and terror of life, which I discuss in the last chapter.

(SJUMC pastor from 2004-09) said, "[A]s a pastor…, I lift the chalice, and those [in the *Pottery of Tears* set] have a nice, good place where you can put your hands. You don't have to hold it like this [like a delicate wine glass], but it has got that big place where you can hold it…The stem ware has impressions from the monument at Tule Lake, and one of the stem wares has [the word] injustice. So, when you're holding that, it's [like you're holding up] injustice" (Grundman 2008). The pastor suggests that the very form of the Tears chalice has meaning, both in the weight of it and its inscription, creating for him the sense of "holding injustice."

I am convinced that Mom understood the match between form and content when she envisioned the *Pottery of Tears*. In talking with her, I find similarities between her experience of communion and the emotions provoked by memories of internment. These include feelings of sadness, connection to a larger tradition, brokenness, and woundedness. When she first saw Anthony Gill's art installation of "Tear Cups," it was not in a religious context nor was there any reference to communion. However, there was something about it that made her imagine the possibility of a Tear Cup as a communion chalice (Goto 2008b).

George and Sue, the two church members, who feel that the communion ware is not as important as the act of communion, experience little or no connection between the form and the content (i.e., the meaning) of the *Pottery of Tears*. For them, using one communion set or another makes little or no difference, however I find their point of view to be the exception, since all others interviewed expressed strong preference for using the *Pottery of Tears* because it embodies the history of the community.

I asked church members what difference it makes to use the *Pottery of Tears* for communion versus a traditional set made, for example, in silver or brass. Alex said, “When you look at a [traditional] goblet, it’s stuff I swear I’ve seen…at Macy’s. To be honest, there’s no meaning behind it. It’s just a standard silver goblet. So, for the church to have these pieces [the *Pottery of Tears*] it makes it more meaningful” (Alex 2008). James agreed, explaining:

> If you were to say, “Why do you use it [the *Pottery of Tears*] versus another set, a traditional set?” the answer would be it has a very, very important historical story to tell and it’s ours. And nobody else has one that they use for communion with that story, with clay from those places. It’s ours. Whether you like the art or not, it is our story that is in the DNA molecule of that piece. People who did not want to be there [in the camps] but were there and came back, actually set foot on that clay, and now it’s alive, and it has significance in a community that’s descended from those steps. (James 2008)

Ordinary as it is, the clay from which the communion set was made brings home the internment story, perhaps giving it materiality, making it “alive” as James said. Alex stated, “[I]t’s good for the church to have these pieces made [because they have] a story behind it...I think it reinforces the ethnic meaning behind and the history behind our church.” He explained, “[I]in everything that the church does, especially in this day and age, you need to have a story. You need to create a connection with every aspect of the church, to make a connection with the membership, to keep it interested and engaged because there are so many opportunities in people’s lives now to say, ‘Well, I won’t go to church this Sunday. It’s not important’” (Alex 2008). The importance of “creating a connection” through story of the *Pottery of Tears* resonates with Rev. Nishikawa’s view that meaning is made when a person is able to connect spirituality of communion to their everyday experience of life, including its joys and hardships, in this case the community’s lived experience of internment.

Some church members appreciate the free form, rough texture of the *Pottery of Tears*, but two people I interviewed do not find the *Pottery of Tears* aesthetically pleasing. Among them is Alex, who felt that even though the communion set is "ugly," (he said chuckling) the fact that it is made from the soil of internment camps makes it meaningful (Alex 2008). Though this might sound like a mismatch between form and content, as if the meaning of the *Pottery of Tears* is constructed despite the "ugliness" of its form, the form reflects the materials from which it is made, in this case the soil of internment camps. Beauty need not be a prerequisite for meaning. Because the *Tears* chalice is a cup of suffering, it makes sense that cup itself would not be pretty. One could argue that a traditional chalice is a greater mismatch of form and content.

Christopher Bollas's notion of the "aesthetic moment" causes me to think that the match between form and content allows a person to find a "fit" with the art. He writes, "The aesthetic experience occurs as *moment*…A spell that holds self and other in symmetry and solitude, time crystallizes into space, providing a rendezvous with self and other (text, composition, painting) that actualizes deep rapport between subject and object. The aesthetic moment constitutes this deep rapport between a subject and object and provides the person with a generative illusion of fitting with an object, evoking an existential memory" (Bollas 1993, 40). Bollas refers to the "rendezvous" between self and other, which in this case is the congregant and *Pottery of Tears* as art or what it represents—Christ and/or those who have been interned. In his view, members of the congregation are having an experience of "fitting with" the *Pottery of Tears*. In referring to the aesthetic moment, Bollas explains that he is "concerned with *moment* as an occasion when time becomes a space for the subject. We are stopped, held, in reverie, to

be released, eventually back into time proper. I believe such moments may occur within the reading of a text, or a poem, or during the experience of hearing an entire reading of a text or a symphony" (Bollas 1993, 49). We saw how the aesthetic moment involved with the *Pottery of Tears* is a moment of reverie for some—a moment to remember the self, their parents, grandparents, or others that survived terrible suffering.

Bollas and Ken Wright, both scholars of object relations aesthetics, understand people's creative acts and transitional objects as attempts to find missing experience, though Bollas prefers to call transitional objects "transformational objects." Bollas says, "As I will argue that each aesthetic experience is transformational, the search for what [Murray] Krieger terms the 'aesthetic object' is a quest for what we may call a transformational object. The transformational object promises to the beseeching subject an experience where the un-integrations of self find integrations through the form provided by the transformational object" (Bollas 1993, 41). Transformational objects function like transitional objects in Winnicott. Bollas writes, "In a 'good-enough' situation the mother as transformational object manipulates the environment to make it symmetrical to human need. As this experience is internalized into the structure of the ego, the self seeks transformational objects to reach relative symmetry with the environment" (Bollas 1993, 44). Bollas believes people engage in a lifelong search for transformational objects to integrate what has been heretofore missing. For members of SJUMC, the *Pottery of Tears* might allow church members to integrate the terrifying memories of the community into their lives, as Moore suggested.

In line with Bollas, Wright (2001) believes that creative acts, including play with transitional objects, is an attempt to find the appropriate medium for expressing missing

experience. Just as in the mother's absence, the baby creatively finds the mother in the blanket, which is a soft, cuddly medium, so too out of a sense of lack, adults are searching for "an external form that contains or fits a missing experience. The creative act involves the discovery of the missing piece experience in another form, and the gap is bridged" (Wright 2001, 83). Experiencing a match between form and content in the *Pottery of Tears*, some church members find an appropriate medium for missing experience, in this case a means to memorialize those who were interned in a way that resonates with their faith.

Imaginative Pilgrimage

While the match between form and content in the *Pottery of Tears* is one factor that hooks people into artistic play, another is its power to invite people to embark on a pilgrimage of the imagination. Mom's art invites a leap of imagination into other worlds, which is a journey of sorts. However, the experience of pilgrimage is also rooted in the life experience of church members and other Japanese Americans, who have recently or regularly visited former internment camp sites.

In 2008, SJUMC took a two-day pilgrimage to Manzanar, one of the interment camps where members of the church were incarcerated. Twenty-nine church members from ages eight to eighty-two participated, including two people who were interned at Manzanar. On the bus, stories about internment were told and the group took communion at the camp site. Though he wished they had it with them, Rev. Grundman (2008) feared the *Pottery of Tears* might suffer damage from the journey, therefore the communion ware remained at the church. However, through the experience of being at

Manzanar, receiving communion onsite, and being in Holy Week, the connection between the community's suffering and Christ's suffering—the very same made by the *Pottery of Tears*—could not have been missed.

SJUMC's pilgrimage is one of many taken by members and friends of the Japanese American community to various internment sites, including Manzanar and Tule Lake. For example, since the first Tule Lake Pilgrimage in 1969 there have been thirteen subsequent pilgrimages through the year 2002, with plans to organize subsequent pilgrimages biannually (Doi 2003).[17] The pilgrimages have a sacred quality about them, allowing people to construct meaning and identity through the retrieval of community memory. Joanne Doi writes:

> These pilgrimages emphasize the significance of this ongoing movement back in time for the construction of meaning and identity for Japanese-Americans and the multicultural reality of the U.S. that is part of American history. A reconnection to a pivotal time in the past, a reconnection to the lives of those who passed through barbed wire fences into a permanent sense of displacement reveals the painful liminal reality that pervades subsequent generations. The place of in-between reveals being at the margins of what may be commonly understood as Japanese and American. Yet this pilgrimage to a place of historical suffering is also a journey of honor and gratitude for the courage, perseverance, and sacrifice that made it possible for future generations of Japanese Americans to flourish. To revisit and remember is to gain a deeper 'understanding and appreciation for the enduring spirit that continues far beyond the bounds of barbed wire.'[18] It is to recognize the very sacredness of our lives. (Joanne Doi, "Tule Lake Pilgrimage: Dissonant Memories, Sacred Journey." In *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, edited by J. N. Iwamura and P. Spickard. [New York: Routledge, 2003], 275)

According to Doi, pilgrimage to an internment site is an opportunity to enter into the suffering of those interned and their painful experience of liminality that later generations

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[17] There seems to be disagreement about when the first Tule Lake Pilgrimage started. According to the Tule Lake Committee, the first was in 1974 and July 2010 will mark the eighteenth pilgrimage organized by the Tule Lake Committee (Tule Lake Committee). It is possible that pilgrimages have been made to Tule Lake organized by others.

[18] Doi's footnote references the 1996 Tule Lake Pilgrimage pamphlet.

have inherited. This is equally true of the *Pottery of Tears*, which also creates an in-between space in which to play with dual identities. Doi writes that pilgrimage is a practice to honor those who have been interned. Llikewise, this could be said of the *Pottery of Tears*.

According to Doi, pilgrimages to relocation sites and other practices like Day of Remembrance began in the 1970s to "search out the truth of the history bound up in the silence of the Nisei and the classroom" (2003, 277).[19] She explains that *niseis*' silence about the internment experience may have stemmed from a desire to protect their children from knowing they were regarded as second-class citizens. According to Donna Nagata, "rather than representing the absence of something, [the silence] highlighted the presence of feelings too complex and painful to discuss" (1993, 102). Just as the pilgrimages to the former camp sites enabled Japanese American descendents to "break the silence," the *Pottery of Tears* functions similarly. *Nisei* June describes her mother's silence when it comes to the internment camps, which is a common family experience among Japanese Americans. Wanting more information about internment for herself, her children, and grandchildren, she reported being glad that the *Pottery of Tears* helps to tell the story (June 2008).

The *Pottery of Tears* may evoke an imaginative pilgrimage to the internment camps though no physical movement is involved. The traditional liturgy spoken in the United Methodist Church takes the congregation on an imaginative return to the Last Supper, yet members of the church also remember experiences of internment, either their

[19] Day of Remembrance is the Japanese American community's annual practice of remembering the internment experience. It is usually held on the anniversary of Executive Order 9066. Each community organizes its Day of Remembrance locally, though there is also a national organization for the Day of Remembrance.

own, those of their family, or those of the community. In receiving communion with the *Pottery of Tears*, those who participated in SJUMC's pilgrimage to Manzanar could easily remember their own physical pilgrimage to the site. Rev. Grundman (2008) suspects that the church will continue to organize such pilgrimages in the future, which could become more important as those who were interned pass away, and the *Pottery of Tears* is not enough to make real the community's narrative of internment. Over time, the *Pottery of Tears* could rely increasingly on the church pilgrimage for its significance.

Doi describes the Tule Lake Pilgrimage as a sacred journey: "[It] can be understood as an attempt to regain our center as human persons and community by reconnecting to our history and each other on the periphery, on the margins. It is a sacred journey to our own otherness that brings us home to ourselves" (Doi 2003, 280). In a sense, the *Pottery of Tears* does the same for SJUMC, adding Christ's sacrifice. For Japanese American Christians, regaining center would mean returning "to the pivotal events that have marked us as Japanese Americans" (Doi 2003, 280) as Doi puts it, but it also means reconciling that history with the pivotal event of the Christian community, that of Christ's death and resurrection.

Taking an imaginative pilgrimage to the camps while receiving communion is a highly creative act. The impulse behind this creative play is supported both by the liminality of being Asian American and by the transitional nature of artistic play itself. As Japanese Americans caught in-between, the *Pottery of Tears* serves as a transformational object as described by Bollas, which allows them to make progress toward the integration of the self through the creativity of play.

Given the liminal state in which they live, Asian American Christians must be reconciled to embracing their "holy insecurity," says Fumitaka Matsuoka, which means finding the courage, resources, (and I would argue the creativity) to live in an unresolved and often ambiguous state of life (1995, 62-63). Although the liminal state of Asian Americans is forced and seemingly permanent, says Princeton Seminary theologian Sang Hyun Lee (2003), liminality provides creative space for what is new and prophetic. For Lee, who draws on Victor Turner's work, liminality not only provides the capacity to be subversive about what is wrong with the present structure and its center, but also a transformative capacity. It allows for new models of structure that may have the power to replace those that dominate the center of a society's ongoing life (Lee 2003, 17).[20] For example, the *Pottery of Tears* invites people to creatively reinterpret the cup of suffering, engaging in an implicit critique of traditional theological interpretations of the Eucharist that fail to account for narratives of communities of color. The *Pottery of Tears* also rejects the traditional aesthetics of communion ware.

Receiving communion with the *Pottery of Tears* provides an opportunity to summon their creativity to cope with the contradictions and ambiguity of being Asian American. According to Winnicott, creativity is an attitude toward external reality, determining whether or not a person feels life is worth living (Winnicott 1971, 87). Those who no longer see the world creatively, who exist rather than live, (e.g., oppressed peoples as in concentration camps or under political regimes), see the world as something that demands compliance and adaptation (Winnicott 1971, 87, 91). He argues that the creative impulse is to be found not only in the artist creating a work of art, but in anyone

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[20] Lee argues that Asian Americans' capacity to be creatively subversive is hampered by racism, which I agree with when it comes to this case study's second example, *Floating Saints*.

who “looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately” (Winnicott 1971, 91). In my estimation, Winnicott is connecting play, and engaging the creative impulse, with agency. When people allow themselves to take an imaginative pilgrimage to the camps or to remember those who were interned, they are experiencing a sense of agency, which is perhaps why some interviewees feel strongly that the story of the community needs to be honored and passed down.

There are multiple spheres of in-betweenness operating in this case. There is the transitional space created by artistic play the *Pottery of Tears*, seen within the liminal space of the sanctuary itself, and there is the liminality in which all Asian Americans live. All of these in-between spaces are marked by shifting identities and dynamic tensions, yet newness and creativity is possible. All help explain why the *Pottery of Tears* draws people into transformative meaning-making.

Making Sense of the Pottery of Tears

I began this study of the *Pottery of Tears* with stories of how Mom engaged me in “What Is It?” before describing how she invites the congregation of SJUMC to play “What’s the Story?” when gathered for communion. In both contexts, Mom wants to engage others in the wonder, delight, and playfulness that she feels in expressing her creative impulse, whether in carving an orange, making paper hugs, or bringing original art to the church’s celebration of communion. She does it partly because artistic play feeds her spirit, not only allowing her to create and use her imagination, but also to create relationship or community with her artistic play. It is simultaneously her way of seeing the world as worthy of living, her approach to teaching, and her form of caring.

When she made talking oranges and paper hugs for me, they were transitional objects that were suitable mother substitutes, reflecting her cleverness, love, and sense of humor. In the art that she brings to the church, she is not serving as the good-enough mother, rather she offers the *Pottery of Tears* as the transitional-object parent(s) of who have been interned, whose ability to endure their descendents still need. Her role as artist, teacher, and theologian is to bring to the church "toys" for the congregation to play with. Without the appropriate transformational objects that resonate with the culture, theology, and aesthetics of the congregation, there is no spellbinding aesthetic moment of retrieval and integration that Bollas describes. Artistic play as pedagogy requires the educator to imagine and offer the fit between form and content and between medium and missing experience in the group—matches that appeal to people's artistic intelligence. In this case, Mom was able to interpret and reflect back in the *Pottery of Tears* an aesthetic that allowed the story behind it to be revealed.

In presenting the right transformational object, Mom makes room for the God of the Unexpected. Surprise is part of her personal aesthetic, which pervades the art she created for me as a child and that she creates for the church. As the interviews revealed, people are not only surprised at the uniqueness of the *Pottery of Tears* but also by how the art evokes the community's story and their own memories. In that transitional space, people experience their own creative impulse to imagine and summon memories related to internment, which are not easily accessed because they are painful or because the community has been silent about its suffering. Japanese American congregations, which tend to be stoic, are uneasy about play in general. However, the space created by play with the *Pottery of Tears* allows the Unexpected to unfold. By encountering what

remains to be integrated into the self when they take communion, the congregation has the opportunity to respond creatively and experience a sense of agency, even in the face of a perennial sense of liminality.

In the multiple in-between spaces represented by the *Pottery of Tears*—the sanctuary itself, and the liminality of the Asian American community—something new emerges, which is evidence of the God of the Unexpected. The *Pottery of Tears* creates the possibility of new God images that speak to Japanese American history to be constructed and proposed, as well as new theological interpretations of the community's past, in which forgiveness and reconciliation are themes. Together these represent an emerging Japanese American practical theology articulated through art and a way of constructing a practical theology through art more broadly.

The *Pottery of Tears* is one example of artistic play at SJUMC, for which Mom is responsible. We move now to a second. As before, I explore how Mom engaged me in a form of play in my childhood, which I call "Pretending to Be." I use this discussion to illustrate how she uses this same play form in artistic play at church, as she memorializes Japanese martyrs.

Floating Saints

Floating Saints is a liturgical art installation created by Mom for All Saints' Day. When the installation opened in September 2001, church members encountered the unexpected when they entered the sanctuary. Two rows of blue-and-white *yukata* (cotton *kimono*) were suspended overhead, and a single *yukata* was tacked to the cross above the altar (See Appendix H). For weeks Mom had collected *yukata* from church members, but

they could not imagine how she would use them. However, what they saw made sense as Rev. Hanaoka told the story of the twenty-six Christians who were martyred in Nagasaki in 1597.

The martyrs, including twenty Japanese (among them two children ages twelve and thirteen) and six Franciscan missionaries, were considered a threat by Hideoyoshi Toyotomi. There were some 180,000 Christians in Japan at the time, with about 50,000 conversions between the expulsion decree and the arrival of the Franciscans in 1593 (Yuuki 1998, 6). Deciding to make examples out of these twenty Christians, Hideyoshi ordered the martyrs' ears cut, forced them on a thirty-day trek on foot and horseback from Kyoto to Nagasaki, and put them to death by crucifixion and the spear. They were beatified on September 14, 1627, and canonized on June 8, 1862. Though known in some Catholic circles, this story is rarely told in Japanese American or other Protestant churches. When Rev. Hanaoka wistfully suggested how appropriate it would be to honor the twenty-six martyrs on All Saints' Day, Mom responded by creating an installation, using the medium she knows best—Japanese textiles. As of 2009, *Floating Saints* has been displayed twice at SJUMC—in September 2001 and November 2007.

Floating Saints engages the congregation in the play forms, "What Is It?" and "What's the Story?" since the installation is a narrative. Like the *Pottery of Tears*, the *yukata* provoke a sense of awe, wonder, and cognitive crucifixion, being seen in a context never before seen. However, I focus on a second play form that Mom uses, which I call "Pretending to Be." While "playing pretend" is a game that all children play, my brother, educational theorist Stanford Goto points out that "playing pretend" usually involves falsification, while "Pretending to Be" involves authentication. In this next section, I

illustrate how Mom used this play form to teach me about Japanese American identity through our family's celebration of Girls' Day. Understanding this will be helpful when I return to *Floating Saints* and explore how the art engages the congregation in "Pretending to Be" Japanese.

Pretending on Girls' Day

Every year on March 3rd my family celebrated Girls' Day or *Hina Matsuri*, which means Doll Festival. According to Michael Yoshii (1996), observing *Hina Matsuri* dates back to the Heian Era in Japan (794-1192). By 1770 *Hina Matsuri* had become a national holiday in Japan associated with the Imperial Palace, where a day was designated for the display of dolls depicting the emperor, empress, and their court. Although the holiday status was removed in 1874, the custom continues as families with daughters, schools, and public offices display doll sets for the day (Yoshii 1996, 49-50).

Though Yoshii makes no reference to Japanese girls dressing in *kimono* and serving sweets in front of their doll displays, that was my understanding of what was "authentic" about Girls' Day—it had to do with costuming, dolls, and food. In my family's American celebration of Girls' Day, I displayed a more motley collection of dolls than a traditional emperor and empress set. Since they were the guests of honor, I often placed the Japanese dolls, many of which were made by Mom, in front and center, but I gave Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and other stuffed friends places on the side so they would not feel left out. I dressed in *kimono* but instead of serving treats to others, I was given the honor of choosing my favorite dinner, which was always "Ugly Meat" (*teriyaki* flank steak put through the tenderizer, giving it its distinctive chewed up look). I spent

the day wearing *kimono*, which I loved especially on that day because it was "official" (See Appendix I).

Mom was both the keeper and transmitter of the tradition, sewing my first *kimono*, making Japanese dolls, and cooking Japanese food. Practicing the everyday sacred, she ensured our celebration of Girls' Day—not because she celebrated it as a child and not because it was common among Japanese American families raising children my age.[21] My parents (my dad deserves credit as well) felt that I should have the opportunity to feel Japanese. On Girls' Day, they too were at play, pretending with me that we were a family living in Japan, yet affirming that I was their cherished American daughter. Mom said to me, "[I]t gave you a sense of your value in the family. This was your special day. We celebrated having a daughter, a girl child. And that was okay, because there was also an opportunity to do it for Boys' Day for Stanford [my brother]" (Goto 2008a).[22]

When I dressed in *kimono* and displayed my dolls, I was playing the "Japanese me," following the tradition of my ancestors, but at other times I reverted to an American girl, the "not Japanese me." Though Japanese Americans are constantly caught in this tension, people are rarely aware of it, but Girls' Day gave me a transitional space to play with those identities. I loved wearing *kimono* and *geta* (wooden slippers) because they made me feel Japanese. They force a person to take dainty, mincing steps, unlike loping American strides. It was a chance to sense in my body the contrast between being

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[21] Masako, a *sansei* member of SJUMC, also recalls dressing in *kimono* for Girls' Day.

[22] Mom recounted that our family did not observe Boy's Day as much as Girls' Day because my brother seemed uncomfortable with the traditional Japanese images of manhood. By flying the *koi* (carp) banners, the family symbolically affirms the strength, courage, determination of the males in the family, encouraging them to be like the carp swimming upstream. My parents left it to each child to decide whether to play "Pretending to Be" Japanese. While my brother chose not to play, I embraced it perhaps because the celebration of Girls' Day could be more easily modified for the American context.

Japanese and being American, and to experience the two cultures pulling against one another like my legs straining against the fabric of the *kimono*. Yet Girls' Day was also a time to practice the consonant flow of both cultures. To others, the clash of Japanese and American dolls might have seemed egregious, but to my child's eyes it was not only beautiful but sensible—a display of cultures that existed in me side-by-side.

In "Pretending to Be" a person experiences not a one-way shift of consciousness but a back-and-forth movement in knowing, taking a person from the familiar to the imagined and returning to the familiar, which can never be perceived the same. On Girls' Day, one transformation took place when I dressed in *kimono*, when I was pretending to be Japanese, and the second unfolded when I took off the *kimono*, when I "magically" became myself. Turning into my American self gave me a bodily sense that the racist messages I was hearing were false: I had not been pretending to be American. I felt American because I was. At day's end, I was glad to run and jump as I usually did, free from the restrictive *kimono*. In Winnicott's terms, the kimono was "destroyed."

Though the *kimono* can be considered an oppressive garment that has subjugated generations of Japanese women, in "Pretending to Be" the *kimono* became a source of delight and discovery, helping me to imagine a Japanese me.[23] The *kimono* was transformed into a reverse "invisibility cloak," a garment that made visible a deeper truth.[24] Play gave me the freedom to appreciate the *kimono* because I could treat it lightly, as a costume that I could put on and take off. As I tired of pretending to be Japanese, the *kimono* reverted to its former oppressive self, or so it seemed. In truth, the *kimono* never stopped being what it was, rather "Pretending to Be" allowed me to

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[23] I appreciate Mai-Anh Le Tran's insight.
[24] In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, Harry owns an "invisibility cloak," a garment that makes him disappear when he puts it on.

experience it as something else. On Girls' Day, I could hold lightly both Japanese and American identities, not allowing either to capture me fully. I could move back and forth, negotiating the beauty and flaws of each, while grasping the intertwining of both identities in me.

In my family's American celebration of Girls' Day, I was engaging in artistic play involving doll display and costuming as an exploration in cultural identity. Though it was a nonreligious ritual, it involved revelation about my heritage as a God-given gift. I was learning to negotiate the dual cultures to which I belong, which was permitted by the transitional space provided by the dolls, the *kimono*, and the Japanese food. Just as Mom facilitated "Pretending to Be" for me as a child, she brings this play form to church members to engage their imaginations.

Like my Girls' Day dolls and *kimono*, the *yukata* are transitional objects that create the transitional space to play between the "Japanese-me" and the "not Japanese me." More often than not, the interplay of American and Japanese cultures is so taken for granted that people have no means to tease out what it means to be Japanese American. Like Girls' Day, "*Floating Saints*" provides an opportunity to play with these dual identities. Even more subtle, bodily experience takes an important pedagogical role in "playing Japanese." In this installation and my family's celebration of Girls' Day, feeling Japanese is not simply a matter of cognition but of kinesthetics and sensuality, even if experienced as body memory as in the case of *Floating Saints*.

Pretending to Be at Church

Just as I put on my *kimono* on Girls' Day to pretend to be Japanese, I reasoned that when church members experience *Floating Saints*, they vicariously try on the *yukata* to do the same. Prior to fieldwork, I hypothesized that the *yukata* functions as a metaphor, standing in for the body—not just any body, but the Japanese Christian body and more specifically the congregant's body. Seeing the *yukata* hung from the ceiling with outstretched sleeves, one can easily imagine a Japanese body being crucified. Provoking a visceral reaction, "*Floating Saints*" illustrates Frank Burch Brown's claim that art partly mediates the body and becomes the body's self-disclosure, allowing the body to speak to the mind (1989, 109). He goes on to argue that the body finds in the work of art an extension and evocation of its own capacities, pleasures, and sensibilities (Burch Brown 1989, 103). Burch Brown's argument inspired me to think that the *yukata* become an extension of people's own bodies, helping them to imagine (perhaps even feel) how the Japanese martyrs suffered.

My interviews partly confirmed my early theory about the *yukata* as embodied metaphor. For *sansei* Alex, because they are displayed with the sleeves outstretched, the *yukata* appear to him like bodies being crucified, suspended in the air. Interpreting the main *yukata* on the cross, he said, "I would say it's obviously a Japanese or a Japanese-American person being crucified. In my mind the connection comes very quickly—*yukata*, Japanese, cross, Jesus, crucifixion—why not?...[B]eing in a Japanese-American church, one could look at it and say, 'We as Japanese-American members must take up the burdens of the cross or bear that burden.' Or one could look at it and say, 'Maybe it's another reflection of, again, the broader display of all the *yukata*.' It could be personal.

It could be us. Or myself, for example" (Alex 2008). Seeing himself on the cross as one possibility, Alex illustrates the imaginative flight of "Pretending to Be."

For *sansei* Masako, the *yukata* on the cross helps her to grasp the horrible physicality of Christ's crucifixion. Though she was shocked at first by the *yukata* on the cross, she said, "It kind of added that human essence for me where it reminded me Jesus was really on there. We don't see that normally" (Masako 2008). For Masako, the *yukata* on the cross reminds her of the reality of Jesus crucifixion, that Jesus' body (and the martyrs' bodies) were really "on there," on the cross. In both cases, the image of the *yukata* on the cross is made meaningful because it registers in the body, creating a visceral reaction that allows a person to make an empathic leap to the martyrs and to Christ. Alex and Masako were using the *yukata* as an embodied metaphor to think theologically, though what they constructed varied.

Some interview data counter my hypothesis about the *yukata* as embodied metaphor. For example, for *sansei* Jennifer, the *yukata* do not suggest bodies, rather she said, "Because there's no people in them [in the *yukata*], it really captures the spirit part and the essence." She went on to explain: "[B]ecause the saints were Japanese and Jesus was not, it kind of brought a commonality, because they are all the *yukata*. And so it transcended, I guess, ethnicity and race to just being the spiritual part that we're all common…[I]t's the Holy Spirit that was common throughout all of them in Jesus. So, then the three [*obi* (Japanese sashes hanging near the cross)] kind of reminded me of the Trinity....I didn't imagine Him [Jesus] necessarily wearing the *yukata* " (Jennifer 2008). Unlike Alex and Masako, Jennifer reveals that the installation provokes no images of bodies and physical suffering, but rather evokes an understanding of the Holy Spirit at

work in the story of the martyrs. By not seeing bodies, she constructs a theology that explains the connection between Jesus and the martyrs despite their differences in ethnicity and race. (Notice Jennifer does not imagine a Japanese Jesus, which is another way of making the connection between Jesus and the martyrs. I explore images of Christ below.) For Jennifer, Spirit creates the commonality between Jesus, the martyrs, herself and all humanity.

One way to interpret the apparent body versus spirit split among the theological interpretations of *Floating Saints* is to point out the obvious—that art and metaphor are multivalent.[25] People use their artistic intelligence in different ways to interpret the same art. In addition, the differences in these interviews also suggest that the *yukata* are ambiguous because they are transitional objects. Not only is there play between the me and not-me (i.e., the martyrs crucified and my own crucifixion, Christ's suffering v. my suffering) but also there is room for play between understanding the *yukata* as bodies and *yukata* as Spirit. In this transitional space of play, the mind is free to transform the *yukata* in multiple ways. The *yukata*'s fluidity makes it a good toy, allowing it to be more useful in the community's development. Alex, Masako, and Jennifer played with the image of the *yukata* as a metaphor, and each came up with what he or she needed, returning to Bollas and Wright's notion about transitional objects and missing experience.

In thinking about *Floating Saints* and the play form "Pretending to Be," I also hypothesized prior to fieldwork the *yukata* function performatively to help people "feel Japanese." According to C. Nadia Seremetakis (1994), artifacts (in this case, *yukata*) can

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[25] Earlier I discussed Schweitzer's concern for the autonomy of art in the church. *Floating Saints* is "real art" (as Schweitzer puts it [2001, 12]) in that it does not dictate strict meanings, but rather it is open for interpretation. Though what people construct with the art is open-ended, the art still has a teaching intention, which is for learners to be able to reflect on what it means to be Japanese American Christian.

be a powerful means of perception and cultural meaning-making. She writes, “As a sensory form in itself, the artifact can provoke the emergence, the awakening of the layered memories and the senses contained within it. The object invested with sensory memory speaks; it provokes a re-call as a missing detached yet antiphonic element of the perceiver. The sensory connection between perceiver and artifact completes the latter in an unexpected and nonprescribed fashion because the receiver is also the recipient of the unintended historical after-effects of the artifact’s presence or absence” (Seremetakis 1994, 10-11). In this case, the *yukata* are invested with sensory memory, how it feels to wear *yukata* as I described wearing *kimono* on Girls’ Day. *Yukata* also bear with them layers of cultural meanings and histories for Japanese Americans, which they bring to their encounter with the *yukata* as *Floating Saints*.[26]

As I suspected, most of the people I interviewed have body memories and/or cultural associations with *yukata* as artifacts. The two oldest people I interviewed about *Floating Saints*, who were *nisei*, had only worn *yukata* once or once in a while. “Auntie” May (2008), who had only worn *yukata* once, said that her *issei* parents eschewed *yukata* because they were Western in their thinking, wanting their children to grow up American. In addition, she never attended *obon*, which would have been an occasion to wear *yukata*, because her family belonged to the Christian church in Loomis, a small rural community where Christians and Buddhists did not socialize in those days.[27] In contrast, all the *sansei* and *yonsei* (with the exception of two) I interviewed either had worn *yukata*

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[26] According to Burch Brown, art exists in a somewhat indeterminate state, and its “plenishment” comes only as the beholder responds, not to what the artist has actually created, but to what the beholder constructs on the basis of the work as well as what she brings to it (e.g., a person’s understanding of genre, style, and meaning or her tacit awareness of non-aesthetic features that color the aesthetic effect) (Burch Brown 1989, 52, 55).

[27] Held in summer, *obon* is Japanese Buddhist festival welcoming the return of the ancestors. Japanese Buddhist temples in the United States, including Sacramento, celebrate *obon*. The festival includes traditional Japanese circle dancing, where dancers typically wear *yukata*.

regularly for special events or festivals, like *obon*, or they lived in Japan for some years, where *yukata* is worn in the summer.[28] Alex's family, which owns twenty-four *yukata*, takes family pictures in *yukata* or wears them around the house.

As just cited, Seremetakis writes, "The sensory connection between perceiver and artifact completes the latter in an unexpected and nonprescribed fashion…" Along these lines, she might argue that the artistically rendered *yukata* in *Floating Saints* dictate a certain cultural/theological meaning, possibly interfering with the never-before-experienced meanings that the artifacts call forth. However, the installation involves a double *poiesis*—first as people encounter the *yukata* as artifacts and second as art. Seremetakis does not address how context affects the perception of artifacts, which is especially relevant as artifacts become art. Prior to fieldwork, my guess was that the *yukata* take on even more significance when they become liturgical art, being presented in a way never before seen by the congregation (i.e., in the context of crucifixion). What is created remains consistent with Seremetakis' definition of *poiesis*, "the making of something out of that which was previously experientially unmarked or even null and void" (1994, 7). In a double *poiesis*, Mom creates a stark contrast by layering death, persecution, and suffering on what is traditionally experienced as a celebratory artifact.[29]

What *Floating Saints* creates is a greater connection between the faith of the Japanese martyrs and church members' own. For *nisei* "Auntie" May, *Floating Saints* made her realize, "Oh my goodness, this is the land where our parents and grandparents grew up." For her, the installation helped her "appreciate what our parents and

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[28] The greater usage of *yukata* among the *sansei* and *yonsei* generations suggests that they are learning to be Japanese American by "Pretending to Be" Japanese. In summary, the younger generation seems to associate *yukata* with memories of time in Japan, which could also indicate a search for identity and the celebration of Japanese American culture.

[29] In Japanese American culture, *yukata* are usually worn for *obon*, a Buddhist festival.

grandparents went through also to come here and then to be converted to Christianity" (May 2008). For *nisei* Mark, *Floating Saints* helped him make a connection between faith and his cultural heritage. He said, when he saw *Floating Saints*, "I felt proud that the church and the Japanese history are coming together as one…I guess it's a kind of pride that the Japanese were there and they gave themselves for the Christ, whereas maybe some people might have just dropped out or who knows" (Mark 2008).

Neither "Auntie" May nor Mark had ever made connections between Christianity in Japan and their own faith. Before *Floating Saints*, "Auntie" May had never heard of the twenty-six martyrs. She said, "When I thought of Japan, I would think of *samurai* and the Buddhists and the Shinto religions, not Christianity" (May 2008). For Mark (2008), his previous knowledge about Christians in Japan was from reading James Clavel's novel, *Shogun*, which involves Japanese Christian characters but contains no account of the twenty-six martyrs. In both accounts, "Auntie" May and Mark express an appreciation of the suffering of those who have gone before, be they the martyrs or the *issei*/*nisei* generations, in an honoring of all the ancestors Japanese and American. Through *Floating Saints*, church members see the martyrs' story as part of their own communal narrative, thereby deepening their understanding of their identity as Japanese American Christians. In this sense, the *yukata* function like the *Pottery of Tears*.

As she did for Girls' Day, Mom uses *Floating Saints* to invite members of the congregation to pretend to be Japanese. Together these examples suggest how powerful artistic play can be throughout the human lifespan. Like "What Is It?" "Pretending to Be" is a play form that evokes the imagination and creates opening for the Unexpected. In the end, my early hypothesis about the *yukata* as embodied metaphor was limited.

Imagining the *yukata* as bodies or spirits (or maybe something else), people are highly creative in their encounter with *yukata* as transitional objects, as I show in the next section. The depth of connections that church members imagine between the faith of the martyrs, the *issei* pioneers, and themselves surprises me. The *yukata* as artifact allows them to feel Japanese, but as art the *yukata* provides an experience of feeling Japanese Christian.

Seeing a Japanese Jesus

Confident in the transformative power of imagination and "playing pretend," I assumed that the Christ *yukata* would change people's image of Christ. Prior to fieldwork, I predicted that church members would see a Japanese Jesus, like the one that Japanese woodblock artist Sadao Watanabe depicts in his work. Dressing the cross with a *yukata* is like depicting a Japanese Christ serving the Last Supper with *sushi*, as seen through the eyes of Watanabe. While this might sound odd to a Westerner, substituting rice for bread as the body of Christ makes sense to an Asian Christian (Takenaka 1986, 34-5). In the case of the Christ *yukata*, I assumed that this new, more culturally relevant God image of a Japanese Jesus would be a natural for church members.

Virtually no one I interviewed imagined a Japanese Jesus when they saw the *yukata* on the cross. This must have been too far fetched since several people remarked that the historical Jesus was not Japanese. (Recall that *sansei* Jennifer made this point.) When *sansei* Alex saw the *yukata* on the cross, he did not intepret it as Jesus. He explained, "Unfortunately, with all the imagery that exists around Christ—you know, golden hair, beard, Caucasian. I would not identify that immediately with Christ because

you don't think of Christ as an Asian-American or Asian-featured person" (Alex 2008). Evidently, for Alex a Japanese Jesus was so dissonant with the images of Christ he had in his mind, he could not perceive an alternative image. Notice his critical awareness of his own indoctrination. In contrast, *nisei* June imagined the historical Jesus wearing *yukata*, which was a creative way of reasoning why there would be a *yukata* on the cross. She said, "I thought it was clever. Because if you had all these saints that had passed away, you would put [*yukata* on] them all, but then Jesus Christ—he wasn't Japanese—but then it's just clothes so not why not put it on him?... I just thought, 'Oh that's great he's got one on too'" (June 2008). When I asked what it means for Christ to wear *yukata*, she said she had never really thought about it.

The only person who came close to imagining a Japanese Jesus was *sansei* James, who expresses a kind of mystical/philosophical notion of the possibility of Christ being Japanese. He said, "[W]e generally don't think of Jesus Christ as being Asian, let alone Japanese, let alone wearing a *yukata*. But it very well may have been that way given another location for this to be proclaimed." When I asked him if that meant he imagined a Japanese Jesus, he replied, "Yeah. I think so. Not so much a Japanese Jesus but that Jesus could be Japanese. Could be. Maybe he was, I don't know. [He c]ould have been many things. So again, I perceive Jesus as being a part of a very spiritual image, kind of symbolic, more than actual flesh." For James, it seems the *yukata* expresses in its cultural particularity a sense that (in his words) "Christ is our Christ, being Japanese." For him, the *yukata* "symbolizes a Japanese perspective on the human aspect of Jesus" (James 2008).

To my surprise, the majority of interviewees said that *yukata* crucifix does not make them think of Christ differently. If anything, I suspect that the *yukata* crucifix provides a new way of illustrating or confirming what interviewees already believe about Christ. For example, several people expressed similar views about how the *yukata* crucifix brought to mind Christ's universality, which I assume they believed prior to seeing the installation. *Sansei* Masako said, "[I]t [the *yukata* on the cross] just reminded me that Christ is for everybody. We're so used to seeing, with a stereotypical blond hair, blue eyes, and it just kind of reminded me that Christ is seen differently by everyone" (Masako 2008). Similarly, *sansei* Colleen says if people saw *Floating Saints*, "[t]hey would learn more about just a different group of people—that how they suffered and how Christ is with all of us. I feel like Christ represents all faiths and all nationalities and all races and it's just kind of neat seeing that up there" (Colleen 2008). In both cases, *Floating Saints* confirmed prior theological understanding, though perhaps in a new, cultural way.

While most people reported that the *yukata* crucifix failed to change their image or understanding of Christ, the youngest interviewees were two exceptions. *Yonsei* Jill says,

> The image [of the *yukata* on the cross] makes me think of Christ differently. While growing up, we were shown pictures of Christ being a white male…I knew He was my eternal Father, but being that He was so different from myself, a Japanese female, He seemed sort of far from me. Seeing the image makes me think of Jesus as hitting closer to home--that it didn't matter what race he was. He stood for all cultures. And the *yukata* just made it more important and brought a closer feeling to me because it directly related to me as a Japanese American. (Jill [pseud.], e-mail message to author 23 October 2008).

The *yukata* crucifix seems to help erase the barrier between Jill and Christ created by images of Christ as a fair-skinned male. Like it did for Masako and Colleen, the *yukata*

crucifix helps Jill realize Christ's universality, regardless of race, yet this insight seems to be newly meaningful and personal for her, not simply confirming or nuancing what she has believed in the past. Not only does the *yukata* crucifix present itself as a new God-image that "hits closer to home" as she says, but it also leads her to critique the God-images of her childhood. Her openness to allowing the Christ image to change her thinking could be partly due to her youthfulness, either being at an age where faith development includes testing God-images or belonging to a generation with greater openness to new God-images.

Among those I interviewed about *Floating Saints*, I showed them two pictures—one of the *yukata* crucifix, and the other a European-looking Jesus wearing a crown of thorns on the cross. Half felt that the *yukata* crucifix was more meaningful, while the other half felt that the traditional crucifix was more powerful. Those who chose the *yukata* crucifix tend to be younger than those who chose the traditional cross. Among those who felt more drawn to the *yukata*, the two most common reasons for their preference were 1) that the image feels more personal by providing a better cultural/theological match and 2) that the image is more hopeful because it suggests that Jesus is risen. Speaking to the first reason, Alex said, "[T[he *yukata* speaks more personally to me or has a greater impact because it speaks to me as a Japanese-American and it's a Japanese *yukata* on the cross" (Alex 2008). Addressing the second reason, Jennifer said,

> I think this image of the *yukata* one, somehow that strikes something deeper in me than seeing Jesus nailed to the cross. I mean, that's very powerful too. But I think, there's differences between seeing the crucifix with Jesus' body on it and then seeing an empty one. This *yukata* one reminds me more of the crucifix, the empty one… it reminds of that but also what happened after Jesus died and was resurrected. So, this has more of a hopeful, futuristic kind of sense versus this

> [European one being] kind of more specific to Jesus [who] died on the cross. (Jennifer 2008)

Those who agreed with Jennifer reflected a traditional Protestant theology in their choice of crucifixes, feeling that the absence of the body from the cross was more meaningful than its presence.

Two people I interviewed felt exactly the opposite—that seeing Jesus' suffering makes the traditional crucifix more meaningful. Two more people felt that the image of the "European Jesus" is more powerful because it is what they grew up with. One of them said something like, "That's the one that's drilled into my head. It means more because I've been conditioned to it." Finally, one person said that the traditional crucifix was more meaningful because the *yukata* crucifix was "just part of my culture" (Field notes, 30 March 2008).

In discussing the Christ *yukata*, a number of people raised critiques of the predominant image of Jesus being of European descent, and by extension Christianity being Western. I have included several references that people made to the "blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus," which suggest their awareness of how they have been indoctrinated. Several interviewees made some important critiques, including "Auntie" May, who says that *Floating Saints* "helps to complete your feelings of a Christian not being, say a Western religion that includes all of us." Elaborating this same critique, James discusses the colonialist assumptions of some Christians. Parodying those who take this view, he says, "[Y]ou might think that this was a white Jesus for mainly white people, but you know, you yellow people, brown people could kind of join in to this too, because the white Jesus loves everybody." For at least these two, *Floating Saints* offers alternative

images of Christ and Christianity that speak to their heritage as people of Japanese descent.

The Christ *yukata* is a provocative image, allowing people to use their artistic intelligence to construct interpretations of who Jesus was/is that creatively reconcile the image with the fact that the historical Jesus was not Japanese. Like the *Pottery of Tears*, the multivalent nature of the Christ *yukata* as art and as symbol allows people to play with it as a transitional object in diverse ways. Although nearly no one perceived a Japanese Jesus and the image failed to transform the ways that people think of Christ, there were still a significant number who felt that the *yukata* crucifix was more personal because it was an Asian representation. Most significantly, the data suggest that *yukata* crucifix provokes critical awareness of how racism has affected their images of Christ and those of the dominant culture. However, *Floating Saints* raises questions about the extent to which artistic play can transform people's imaginations, especially in the face of enduring images such as Christ as European.

Limitations on Playing with Christ Images

Suggesting that play with God-images is more constrained than one might think, my interviews challenge Ann Ulanov's work. According Ulanov, people understand the reality of God through two sets of images that people play with in the transitional space of religion. One set contains subjective God-images (the me-images, which she refers to as our personal and group gods), while the other set includes objective God-images (the not-me images, including those that are given by tradition).[30] Ulanov says:

[30] While Ulnaov discusses personal gods, group gods, as well God-images. To remain clear, I refer to God-images exclusively since members of SJUMC believe in God not gods.

> [A]ny of us who look to our experience for information about this object God will know that we land irrevocably in between the God that tradition gives us and the God we create out of the stuff of human life. Even further, we land between all our human images for God, not just our personal and group gods but also those found in Scripture and tradition about the profound and puzzling mystery of the divine. In this space we discover and create ourselves as children of God. Winnicott's work on our earliest transitional spaces enables us to see our transition into self in relation to the Holy. (Ann Ulanov, *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 20-21)

When Ulanov refers to the "God we create out of the stuff of human life," she means personal or group gods. Since the *yukata* come from the stuff of people's lives—memories of summer festivals like *obon*, travel to or life in Japan, or family pictures—these can become the stuff of a subjective God-image. In the case of those I interviewed, they are playing with the *yukata* as a possible subjective, group God-image.

According to Ulanov, group images of God reflect a collective-ego point of view, for example mirroring a group's experience of race, gender, or political oppression (2001, 23). From these group pictures have developed Black theology, feminist theology, and Minjung theology. According to Ulanov, group God-images speak of collective experiences of God's imminence based on experiences of talking with God, hearing God talk to believers, and sensing that God is living in the midst of those who believe. Ulanov says, "We must endow our images of God with parts, often unconscious of our subjective experiences. Otherwise God will not feel real to us" (2001, 23).

According to Ulanov, transcendent, objective God-images found in Scripture and tradition must balance the immanence of subjective God-images. Rather than reflecting back parts of ourselves, an objective God-image "directs us to see what is required of us in action and word as a result of this God addressed to us" (Ulanov 2001, 27). While Ulanov mentions that objective God-images can conflict with subjective God-images, she

does not explore fully the implications, which are critical for racial/ethnic minority Christians. Inherent in the tradition are images of God as the blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus, which should be more properly understood as a group God-image. To fail to critique the colonialist God-images of tradition privileges and maintains the elevated status of a particular group God-image, allowing it be normative and directive.

Ulanov assumes that the production of group God-images is unproblematic, free, and unfettered. While I can see how it would be easy for an individual to develop a personal pantheon of God-images from the stuff of his/her everyday life, my interviews suggest that developing group God-images is difficult, especially for a local racial/ethnic minority Christian community. Seeing a Japanese Jesus is beyond the scope of imagination for most of those I interviewed. While I accept the possibility that a Japanese Jesus is inappropriate for this group of interviewees, I still ask, why do people fail to imagine other alternative, radical, culturally relevant God-images like that of James? Why do most people simply modify the safe God-images they already have? Sometimes flights of imagination fail in the transitional space of play, which theoretically provides the openness for imagination to soar.

Theorizing why a person's play-capacity is hampered, Winnicott attributes limitations of the transitional space to a deficit in parenting. He refers to "the relative lack of cultural erudition or even the lack of acquaintance with the cultural heritage which may characterize those actually in charge of a child" (Winnicott 1971, 137). In some ways, the church has been deficient in its "parenting," especially in terms of religious education that has allowed some God images but not others.[31]

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[31] I thank Theodore Brelsford for this insight.

In addition, limitations in the transitional space of the church are also due to culture, especially for Asian Americans. As discussed above, Sang Hyun Lee argues that Asian American experience their in-betweenness not as a temporary condition or a creative opportunity, but a forced marginalization because of racism. Referring to Turner's notion that the revitalization of society involves a dialectic movement between structure and anti-structure, Lee argues, "Their [Asian Americans'] liminality does not naturally lead to the re-aggregation or entrance or re-entrance into structure, as would be the case in normal change process" (Lee 2003, 25). In the case of Asian-Americans, the creative potentials of liminality are "repressed, thwarted, and frustrated" because of racism, "taking away from them the courage and self-respect needed to face up to the creative challenge of the liminal experience" (Lee 2003, 25). While a liminal condition can open awareness to the new, Asian Americans are discouraged from embracing their new identity as the synthesis of Asian and American worlds, when it is not celebrated, rejected or feared by the larger American society (Lee 2003, 25).

Lee's analysis sheds light on why half the church members I interviewed rejected the image of the *yukata* crucifix. It seems internalized racism prevents some people from accepting the image. Recall that two people interviewed were aware that they could not be open to the image because the Euro Jesus crucifix was an image they grew up with or had been "drilled into their heads," while a third person dismissed the *yukata* image as merely being part of her culture. All these reactions suggest that racism in the church, which maintains the Euro Jesus image as normative, discourages racial/ethnic minority Christians from accepting alternative God images, even those that would appear to resonate with their own culture.

Floating Saints is probably the first time members of the congregation have been offered such a radical God-image with a more open critique of the colonialist tradition. Unlike the *Pottery of Tears*, *Floating Saints* proposes a God-image that is too risky for most. Perhaps in the *Pottery of Tears*, it is easier to accept the image of a God who suffered with those who were interned than to embrace the image of a Japanese Jesus, which directly challenges all the dominant, sanctioned images they have of Jesus. I would not underestimate people's need for reassurance that embracing the *yukata* crucifix does not involve sacrilege. For example, one person I interviewed was relieved to learn from Rev. Hanaoka that it is acceptable for Christians to perform *o-shoko* (Buddhist practice of offering incense) at a Buddhist funeral (Hanaoka 2008).[32] People, especially Japanese Americans whose heritage is a conformist, non-confrontational culture, need permission to challenge what the church has taught them.

The unquestioned acceptance of the Euro Jesus as an objective God-image is also related to colonialist assumptions that the Christian faith is incompatible with Japanese or other racial/ethnic minority cultures. Rev. Hanaoka traces the split between faith and culture in the Japanese American church to American missionary efforts in Japan. He says, "Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity, was a product of missionary movement in Japan. And missionaries not only brought Christian gospels but also American culture because that was the only thing they knew. And they sort of preached that the proper context of the Christian faith was American culture. So, they encouraged the Japanese people to get rid of their Japanese culture" (Hanaoka 2008). One example

[32] Rev. Hanaoka (2008) said, "[I]ncense burning was a part of Christian tradition and it's even biblical. The Book of Revelations talked about the incense smoke going up to heaven as a form of prayer, and so I suggest…that if you're comfortable…with burning incense in a Buddhist funeral for instance, do it quietly, say it quietly in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit to keep the Trinitarian characters of the faith and still participate."

of Japanese people ridding themselves of Japanese culture to embrace Christianity and American culture is "Auntie" May's story about her parents shunning *obon* and *yukata*. Given the community's historic experience of being missionized and colonized, it is understandable why the *yukata* crucifix is a challenging image to some. On the other hand, *Floating Saints* involves the story of conversion of the Japanese by missionaries, which is ironic, given the fact that the installation also functions to reinforce the connection between Japanese American faith and cultural identity.

The power of "Pretending to Be" as a play form is not necessarily in provoking the imagination to play with new God-images, a direction constrained by racism and colonialism. Rather, as I argue in the next two sections, it lies in helping people to imaginatively create missing experience, as was the case for the *Pottery of Tears*. In *Floating Saints*, church members are constructing communal memory through artistic play to gain missing experience, both from the perspective of object relations theory and performance theory.

The Recovery and Construction of Communal Memory

SJUMC can be understood as a "community of memory," a term Ronald Takaki uses to describe how Asian-Americans have drawn upon elements of their culture, including art and narrative, to sustain them. Applying this to Christian churches, Fumitaka Matsuoka writes, "As they listen to the stories and become members of a 'community of memory,' they are recovering roots deep within this country and the homelands of their ancestors. In the face of poverty, racially motivated violence, inadequate housing, alienation, and strains on family, Christian churches have been the

'community of memory' for many Asian Americans…" (Matsuoka 1995, 28-29) Matsuoka goes on to argue that such a community of memory creates cultural structures and affirms the peoplehood, in this case of the church, despite threats of annihilation. Efforts to recover communal memory and strengthen cultural identity are in tension with social forces that encourage Japanese Americans to forget their community's history and heritage.

Like the *Pottery of Tears*, the *yukata* function as artifacts that help in the construction of memory. In the *Pottery of Tears*, church members are recovering memories of the internment camp experience, building a community of memory based on real life experiences that happened since the pre-war immigration of Japanese to the United States. In *Floating Saints*, the construction of new memories is taking place, expanding the repertoire of what is counted as the story of Japanese American Christians. *Floating Saints* proposes that the community's roots should reach back to the sixteenth century, to the story of the twenty-six martyrs.

Though the creation of memories may sound strange, it is characteristic of contemporary communities. According to Danièle Hervieu-Léger, the need to construct memory is due to the fragmented nature of communal memory, exacerbated by rapid social change. He writes, Hervieu-Léger writes:

> [F]orms of compensation... develop in reaction to the symbolic vacuum resulting from the loss in depth and in unity of collective memory in modern societies. And the reaction is the sharper because the gouging of memory, as experienced, is contradicted by the subjective sense of duration felt by individuals who are now in the main longer-lived. It is a contradiction that must be resolved by invoking substitute memories, multiple, fragmentary, diffuse and associated as they are, but which promises that something of collective identification, on which the production and reproduction of social bonds depends, can be saved. (Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000], 141)

Building on Hervieu-Léger, Hallam and Hockey argue that communities "creatively draw upon and deploy a range of cultural resources in attempts to fashion their distinctive identities and past affiliations" (2001, 207). In this case, the *yukata* serve as cultural resources for the community to creatively shape and reinvent a repertoire for SJUMC as a community of memory. Hallam and Hockey suggest that "materials of memory" (in this case the *Pottery of Tears* and the *yukata*) have not only become increasingly broad, but are being continuously manipulated in the fashioning of distinctive memory communities (2001, 207). Expanding the communal memory of SJUMC to include the martyrs requires an imaginative leap that only "Pretending to Be" could provide.

Like the *Pottery of Tears*, the *yukata* serve as transitional objects to help people integrate missing experience in the community. Hallam and Hockey's work suggests that what is missing is a sense of continuity with the past, which is always partial. Hallam and Hockey assert that "new Western forms of memory making are *partial* because there is no way back to a 'total' or seemingly unified social memory" (2001, 197). To reveal the church's missing sense of continuity with the past, I turn to once again to performance theorist C. Nadia Seremetakis.

Seremetakis argues that lost or marginalized experiences can be recovered through sense memory and artifacts. Discussing the "discourse on loss," she argues that cultures that have experienced colonialization undergo a public "defamiliarization" of experiences, practices and narrative, which results in the loss of sense memory (1994, 8-9). Recovery of sense memory and the material forms that contain it, says Serkemetakis, has long been the task of philosophers and artists such as composer Ernest Bloch and the Surrealist painters. They "insisted [that] the cosmos of economically discarded cultural

artifacts constitutes a vast social unconscious of the sensory-emotive experience that potentially offers up hidden and now inadmissible counter-narratives of once valued life worlds" (1994, 10). By tending to objects that have been cast aside, the surplus memory and meanings within them become available.

In *Floating Saints*, the *yukata* have not yet been lost but must be recovered from the community each time the installation is shown. Most of the *yukata* belong to the Japanese-speaking members of the congregation, most of whom are women born in Japan in their 70s and 80s, whose numbers are dwindling. The *yukata* are an endangered artifact in a Japanese American congregation, since most American born families do not possess *yukata*. Many *nisei* and *sansei* church members are giving away things Japanese to the church rummage sale and probably other charities or perhaps simply throwing them away. However, when they see seeing the *yukata* as *Floating Saints*, members of the congregation are given the opportunity to "feel Japanese," an experience missing from their consciousness.

Through the artistic play of *Floating Saints*, church members construct missing experience that has not only to do with continuity to the past, but also a sense of homecoming that reconciles faith and culture. Avery Gordon's work on haunting provides a helpful way of reflecting on this.

Summoning Home the Ghosts

According to Avery Gordon, haunting describes "how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (Gordon 1997, 8). The "seething presence" of *Floating Saints* is not so

much the martyrs themselves, but the irreconcilable injustice, persecution and suffering that they suffered. The ghostly martyrs, who are signs of this disturbing memory, come to disquiet any inclination toward an easy, "feel good" Christianity or an internalized Western Christianity among people of Japanese descent.

Gordon comments, "[T]he ghost is not simply a dead person or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity meets social life" (1997, 8). In referencing this meeting place of history and subjectivity, Gordon refers to the reliving of events as means of transforming knowledge. Haunting involves the

> reliving events in all of their vividness, originality, and violence so as to overcome their pulsating and lingering effects. Haunting is an encounter in which you touch the ghost or the ghostly matters of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood, the violence and the hope, the living and recalling actualities, the shadows of ourselves and our society. When you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter (or when it touches you), a force that combines the injuries and the utopian, you get something different than you might not have expected. (Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 134-5)

In the case of *Floating Saints*, artistic play enables the haunting, the reliving of this violent story of martyrs in Japan.[33] Even those who had some prior knowledge of the twenty-six martyrs before *Floating Saints* experienced the story in a fresh way because it came to life (I would argue) through artistic play. In the excerpt above, Gordon even makes a reference to the unexpected, which points to how being haunted by the ghostly martyrs invites the God of the Unexpected.

Through Mom's art, the congregation summons the ghosts, literally from out of the closets and dark storage spaces of the community, which can be interpreted

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[33] Gordon's analysis of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, supports the possibility that art can create a case of haunting, in which not only does the character Beloved haunt those in the story, but the story haunts the readers.

metaphorically as the banished places of the community's consciousness. The congregation is giving them presence by giving them "bodies," by clothing those who were erased in life and forgotten by some parts of the church in death. In that sense, *Floating Saints* is a homecoming for these ghostly martyrs who were denied nationhood in Japan, as they were perceived as traitors by adopting the religion of foreigners. By summoning them, members of SJUMC invite the ghostly martyrs to inhabit a place where their Japanese and Christian identities are welcomed and celebrated. The image of homecoming is also created by the *yukata* floating in the space of the sanctuary, with its heavy wood beams running the length of the ceiling. In designing the sanctuary, Wayne Osaki (2007) wanted to evoke the feeling of a feudal castle of Japan with its white walls, dark trim wood trim, and huge exposed beams in the ceiling. He had read that the early Japanese Christians used to meet in the castles of feudal lords who were sympathetic to them. In this contemporary sanctuary, the ghostly martyrs return to a place reminiscent of their historic places of refuge and sanctuary.

According to Gordon, the purpose of the ghost is to shock the haunted into what Walter Benjamin calls "fighting for an oppressed past," referring to "whatever violence has been repressed and in the process formed into a past, a history, remaining nonetheless alive and accessible to encounter" (Gordon 1997, 66-67). For the Japanese martyrs, the oppressed past is the violent severing of faith from culture, when Hideyoshi Toyotomi demanded that Japanese Christians renounce their faith or suffer persecution and death. What does this mean for modern Japanese American Christians? Haunting always demands a response, according to Gordon. For members of SJUMC, fighting for the oppressed past that ghostly martyrs point to involves the healing of historic rift between

faith and culture. The lessons of the twenty-six martyrs provide a “lever,” as Gordon says, toward rethinking of their identity as Japanese American Christians.

As transitional objects (subjective-objects), the *yukata* reflect back missing, vital truth about Japanese Americans. As Japanese people who were denied their nationhood because of their faith, the martyrs serves as ghostly mirrors to Japanese American Christians, who, as subjects of missionary zeal, were encouraged to give up their culture for their new identity as Christians.[34] In object relations theory, mirroring is critical in the development of self. Interpreting Winnicott, Ulanov explains that he calls “subjective-objects those things we perceive and depend on to exist that reflect back to us our own aliveness, that mirror our own needs and wishes, that conform to our view of reality” (Ulanov 2001, 16). The mother is a baby’s first subjective-object (the me-object), who in her play and mimicking mirrors back to the baby his or her own self, providing a sense of “me-ness.” In the case of the ghostly martyrs, the congregation “create” them by giving them clothes, and in so doing the church symbolically restores the cultural heritage of the martyrs, giving back to them what was denied. In doing this for the martyrs, they are restoring and recovering their own cultural heritage, perhaps healing the split between faith and culture and affirming the sense of longed for wholeness for Japanese American Christians.

Diego Yuuki’s books, which are sold at the Monument to the Twenty-Six Martyrs in Nagakasi, refer to the martyr’s thirty-day march from Kyoto to Nagasaki as a pilgrimage. This image is created in *Floating Saints* as Mom places the *yukata* in two rows, all facing the cross, as if they are marching toward the cross (to their deaths or to

[34] As mirrors of the martyrs in a second sense, Japanese Americans (Christian and otherwise) were denied their nationhood because of their race.

Christ, depending on one's interpretation). In addition, each time *Floating Saints* is installed, the ghostly martyrs make a pilgrimage in forward time and from Japan to American, as the congregation hosts a homecoming. This seems to mirror the congregation's imaginative pilgrimage back in time and from America to Japan.

Making Sense of Floating Saints

The surprise of *Floating Saints* is not simply that there are *yukata* hanging in the sanctuary, but that the *yukata* create a powerful presence and allow the congregation to experience the storied world of the martyrs, which mysteriously parallels their own. Both in image and story, the ghostly martyrs haunt the members of the church, taking hold of people's imaginations in ways they do not expect.

The installation's power to teach stems from its ability to provoke the imagination and to summon artistic intelligence. Like the talking oranges, everyday *yukata* are transformed into art and made sacred in Mom's hands. Had she stacked them on the altar, they would not have the same effect. In fact, the *yukata* would look out of place and therefore irrelevant, but artistically rendered, they make people take notice, activating people's imagination. According to Maria Harris, imagination "looks at reality from the reverse, unnoticed side; as such, it is the mind's glory, the ample fullness of intelligence, rather than the thinness of reason alone" (1991, 9). At the same time, she says imagination finds its rooting in biography and body, making comprehension "more comprehensive and comprehending" (Harris 1991, 9).

One concern for Japanese American churches is how much longer *Floating Saints* will be able to tap into the biography and body of the community. According to

Seremetakis, once cultural instruments for making meaning from material experience are lost (i.e., they no longer have significance in the sensory landscape), people lose the perceptual means to seek identity (1994, 8). In other words, once *yukata* are no longer rooted in the sensory experience of Japanese Americans, people will no longer be able to imagine the connections between themselves and the twenty-six martyrs in quite the same way. When links to body and biography are broken, imagination fails to take flight.

In *Floating Saints*, the *yukata*'s ambiguity makes it a good toy for playing pretend. As the interviews showed, members of the congregation can interpret the *yukata* in multiple ways, for example as bodies or as spirits. Playing pretend allows the congregation to hold lightly the contradictions of the *yukata* as crucifix. Like the *kimono* on Girls' Day, the *yukata* enable people to move back and forth between contrasts that may have never been held side-by-side—the beauty of the *yukata* and the horror of crucifixion, a Japanese Jesus and the Europeanized Christ, and the Japanese Christian experience and that of their American descendents. Each polarity may seem so disparate that the mind can only flit between them, not necessarily to reconcile them but to create new awareness by experiencing their juxtaposition. In artistic play, imagination enables people to construct insight between the familiar and the new by allowing the mind to shuttle back and forth. Playing pretend gives us a litheness of imagination that does not allow any one meaning of the *yukata* crucifix to dominate.

The pedagogic power of artistic play stems from its ability to release the imagination (as Greene [1995] describes it), but imagination can be constrained by cultural forces. While racism and colonialism may impede people from imagining a Japanese Jesus, the artistic play of *Floating Saints* allows members of the congregation to

construct missing experience, including communal memory and a sense of homecoming—coming home to themselves. By allowing people to create missing experience, *Floating Saints* and *Pottery of Tears* allow church members to learn to be Japanese American Christian, which resonates with the church's historic mission discussed by Rev. Barbaree and Rev. Hanaoka.

Claiming what has been missing, namely the reconciliation of faith and culture, is made possible both through narrative as well as through sense experience. Knowing the story of the twenty-six martyrs (i.e., responding to "What is it?") is not enough. One must also feel Japanese (i.e., respond to "Pretending to Be"), which is experienced in the sense memory of artifacts turned art.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored two examples of Japanese American liturgical art at SJUMC, which shed light on how artistic play allows people to seek the God of the Unexpected. In the *Pottery of Tears* and *Floating Saints*, Mom presents the congregation with a play form that engages the imagination, inviting people irresistibly into a flight of imagination, a pilgrimage of sorts. Without a doubt, many people play "What Is It?" and "Pretending to Be" as children, perhaps not unlike how Mom engaged me as child. However, these play forms are also powerful means of transformation, as people to enter deep and sometimes hidden or scary places of imagination and communal memory, where parts of the self are missing and yet to be constructed.

While the play form is the hook for engaging the imagination in these examples, the art must also be a suitable medium for creating missing experience. In *Pottery of*

Tears and *Floating Saints*, Mom envisioned or created the match between form and content that others would experience. Artistic play as pedagogy requires the educator to imagine and offer the fit between medium and missing experience in the group, in a match that appeals to artistic intelligence. In both these examples, the medium was fluid enough to allow for people to find within it a range of missing experience but specific enough to teach.

Chapter 4
The Issei Garden

A Japanese-style garden is a second type of art in this project, which comes from the same case study as Mom's art located at the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC). In this chapter, I explore the practice of aesthetic SEEING in the Issei Memorial Garden built in the courtyard of the church (See Appendix J).[1] Though rarely used for ceremonial purposes, the garden (like Mom's art) attests to the church's commitment to preserving communal memory, Japanese aesthetics, and Japanese American identity. Construction of the Issei Garden began in 1970 and it was dedicated in 1972 at the time of the merger to honor the immigrant pioneers who started the church.[2] This chapter focuses on the artistic play of those who care for the Issei Garden, known as the Garden Angels, as well as church members who spend time looking at it.[3,4]

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[1] I use SEEING to distinguish this as a practice, as opposed to everyday seeing, which is taken-for-granted. Frederick Frank (1973) uses this convention and explains the distinction, which I include later.

[2] As Japanese-Americans reformed communities and community pride after the war, they rebuilt Japanese-style gardens (Brown 1999, 14). While some Buddhist temples, for example, signaled the congregation's culture by including token pine trees, stones, and lanterns in their landscaping, a few (e.g., Buddhist temples in San Jose and Anaheim, California) constructed full-fledged gardens, which were made by parishioners and a landscaping business. SJUMC's garden, which was built much later than the community's return from camp, was probably part of a different trend. Some Japanese-style gardens were built as symbols of friendship between American and Japanese sister cities, a federal program instituted in the 1950s, while other gardens were built to commemorate Japanese American history, a response and a contribution to the ethnic pride movement of the 1960s (Brown 2000, 94). The Issei Garden likely falls into this last category.

[3] The Garden Angels care for the church facility and grounds, including the Issei Garden. While not all the work of the Garden Angels is artistic play, it is impossible to excavate one practice from the subculture in which it is embedded.

[4] The Garden Angels consists of approximately fifteen volunteers (nearly all are retired *nisei* men, except for Mom and two other women), with about ten showing up on a work day, and three are not church members. Each Thursday morning they gather at 7:00 AM for a hot breakfast (usually at the church but sometimes at a local restaurant) before they begin their work. There is a job for everyone who wants to participate—from working in the Issei Garden, to blowing the pavement, to removing an old stump on the grounds, to repairing a stove in the main kitchen. Sometimes they receive assignments, but they tend to have regular jobs. Though the Garden Angels started with no money, through donations and their own fundraising, they have been able to buy professional landscape and maintenance equipment to replace broken, stolen, and cheap equipment, making the work safer and more efficient. They created secure

Mom is among a small number of Garden Angels dedicated to tending the Issei Garden, which is 1,556 square feet. Every week all year round, she and others give special care to the pine and maple trees, which look like *bonsai* except for their taller height and their roots in the ground. For most of the garden's life, the trees have been pruned with hedge sheers or an electric saw, which is efficient but prevents the trees from growing optimally and fails to bring out the Japanese aesthetic of their form. Retired horticulturalist "Uncle" Ed Kubo taught Mom and several others how to prune the trees with a fine-point clipper, a traditional technique that is tedious and labor-intensive but yields healthy, beautiful trees.[5] He claims Mom is one of his best students, not only because she has patience but because she has an eye for it. She and others are practicing an ancient Japanese art that has largely been lost in America.

The care and appreciation of the Issei Garden are practices in aesthetic SEEING. As I explain in the next section, people are learning to SEE the trees and the garden in an imaginative, relational way that playfully engages them in both art and culture and fosters artistic intelligence. However, SEEING is neither passive nor disinterested, as if it were a matter of seeing what is objectively there. Rather, SEEING is subjective, constructive, and creative. For example, those who built the garden had to SEE it before it existed, just as the Garden Angels must continue to SEE the garden in order to maintain it, improve it, and remain true to its essence. Church members must SEE the garden in order to have a meaningful relationship with it. In contrast, those who pass the garden without pausing to look at it see the garden but fail to engage it.

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storage spaces for their equipment to prevent the thievery of the past. They provide food on their work days, organize outreach programs, and support the church youth programs.

[5] Again, I refer to "Uncle" Ed as "Uncle" to be transparent about my personal relationship with him and to show respect.

The Issei Garden, and the trees in particular, draw people into relationships with them by the power of their visual "stickiness." According to Stephen Pattison, "Complex patterns and details induce a sense of unfinished fascination with objects that ensures continuity of interest and relationship, making objects 'sticky' for the human gaze…" (2007, 133). In this case, the complex patterns that catch the eye are created by the meticulous pruning of the trees and shrubs. According to Pattison, the technical skill needed to produce a visual artifact, in this case a Japanese-style garden, so far exceeds the competence of viewers that they cannot imagine doing it themselves, therefore people are fascinated by it. Furthermore, the visual stickiness of the garden is also maintained by its changing appearance, its meanings evolving with the seasons and over its lifetime. Pattison writes, "Like the people we meet, visual objects change their meanings and significances constantly. This instability and change may itself help images to become lively eye-traps that seduce viewers into inarticulate, but important, relationships" (2007, 144). The way that the garden draws people in to engage in artistic play is like Mom's use of the play form that hooks people into imaginative engagement with her art. Here the hook is the garden's irresistible visual stickiness.

Kendall Brown calls Japanese-style gardens "territories of play," echoing John Dixon-Hunt's notion that gardens involve theater or make believe, as sites of artifice pretending to be nature (Brown 1999, 27). According to Brown, Japanese-style gardens in America involve the fantasy of the "Japanese garden," referring to the illusion that what is planted in America is the equivalent of what is made in Japan. He writes, "[M]ost of these gardens [in America] are Japanese only in the most perfunctory of ways. They may look reasonably Japanese, but they neither *feel* nor *act* Japanese. Even when

gardens are used for such Japanese activities as tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) or moon-viewing, the function seems stilted and unnatural—a revival or masquerade akin to an academic exercise or carnival attraction" (Brown 1999, 8). Brown argues for the term "Japanese-style garden" to clarify that gardens built outside of Japan reflect different uses and "landscape languages" than gardens in Japan (1999, 8). In his analysis of Japanese-style gardens as "territories of play," there is an element of "Pretending to Be." As I discuss in a moment, the Issei Garden serves as an imaginative meeting place of the living and the dead, of America as home and Japan as ancestral land. As in the case of Girls' Day, playing pretend in the Issei Garden can lead to authentication. In this transitional space, people (particularly the men involved with its care) are allowed to play with, perform, and construct a Japanese American self.

In this territory of play, people encounter the God of the Unexpected as they develop surprising relationships with the garden and play with iterations of the self and culture, made possible by this transitional space. The Issei Garden attests to the importance of creating and maintaining a dedicated space where the God of the Unexpected can be revealed and where the community can engage in artistic play on an ongoing basis. The example is dramatic because the garden is a physical, boundaried space that is available year-round for artistic play.

The Issei Garden potentially reveals more about artistic play at SJUMC than either the *Pottery of Tears* or *Floating Saints* in that the landscape is an ever-present yet ever-changing record of past and present artistic play in the garden. When the *Pottery of Tears* is stored or when *Floating Saints* is not installed, they are not being engaged and therefore not "performing," whereas a landscape is constantly at work. According to

Christopher Tilley, "The landscape is an anonymous sculptural form always already fashioned by human agency, never completed, and constantly being added to and the relationship between people and it is a constant dialectic and process of structuration: the landscape is the medium *for* and outcome *of* action in previous histories of action. Landscapes are experienced in practice, in life activities" (Tilley 1994, 23). Because the garden is a medium for and an outcome of the artistic play of all those who have worked in it, the garden sheds light on artistic play as a historic practice as well as a current one.

SEEING as Artistic Play

The Issei Garden was first built because one man was able to SEE a Japanese-style garden that did not yet exist. This man was the garden's original architect, Masao Yoshiyama, an *issei* horticulturalist who was greatly respected in the community.[6] Under his leadership, *nisei* men of the church built the garden, some of whom still serve as Garden Angels. Though Mr. Yoshiyama promised to care for the garden once it was built, he died shortly after. Through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s the care of the garden fell to a maintenance crew, which consisted of one or two people with the help of other volunteers for special occasions. No one was trained in maintaining a Japanese-style garden, meaning no one had the ability to SEE and therefore care for it as Mr. Yoshiyama had done. The maintenance crew's goal was not to create art but to keep the garden neat and tidy. No SEEING was involved because they intended to complete the job as fast as possible, which meant using hedge sheers or an electric saw. In 2002, a major revitalization and redesign of the garden began, which was led by "Uncle" Ed, who like Mr. Yoshiyama, has the ability to SEE. He teaches Mom and others to SEE the garden in

[6] I refer to him as "Mr. Yoshiyama," which is how church members remember him.

order to care for it—not to get the job done quickly, but because it is an end in itself, which is characteristic of play. Now Mom helps to teach the newest learners.

Before my formal fieldwork started, Mom gave me a lesson in SEEING the trees. As I watched her thin a pine tree, the task seemed simple until I tried it. When deciding what to snip away, I discovered that the needles growing downward were easy pickings, but determining what to thin was not readily apparent. The branches that she had groomed looked spare and airy, but the small branch I was tackling (now for over an hour) was still choked with needles. As I crouched to examine the underside of my branch, I realized there was no way I would spend hours analyzing how pine needles grow unless I was on vacation. SEEING, I discovered, is not that easy.

According to Greg Kitajima, a *sansei* who received professional training in Japan for aesthetic pruning, a master will not allow an apprentice to touch a pine for ten years(Discussion with author, 27 January 2007, Hawthorne, California). The student must learn pine theory, including how pine trees grow and how they respond to cuts, in order to see the "movement" of the tree and how to work with its natural beauty. To a Japanese master, Mom's try-it-and-see approach to pruning from day one is sacrilege, but it is practical, given the church's need to quickly recruit anyone willing to learn. Pines at other Japanese American churches and temples grow weak with years of neglect or hasty pruning since there are not enough people with the time or skill to SEE the trees and prune them the old way. For the Japanese, the goal of apprenticeship is mastering the art of pruning, where the student's worth is based on the artistry he (and I do mean "he") produces. However, Mom was approaching this teaching moment from the perspective of artistic play, which emphasizes process. For her, mastering the technique was only a

means to an end, that of having fun. Most important to her was whether I was enjoying myself. In this case, her try-it-and-see approach was partly about learning by doing, but it was also an invitation to surrender myself to the experience of SEEING, even if what I produced was imperfect.[7]

SEEING the trees presents the opportunity for what Diane Ackerman (1999) calls "deep play," which is an experience of transcendence. The tedious work of trimming pine needles might not seem like play, but it is for Mom and others. According to Ackerman, "In rare moments of deep play, we can lay aside our sense of self, shed time's continuum, ignore pain, and sit quietly in the absolute present, watching the world's ordinary miracles. No mind or heart hobbles. No analyzing or explaining…Nothing need be thought or said. There is a way of beholding that is a form of prayer" (1999, 23). As I crouched with Mom beneath the pine trees in the cold drizzle, my frozen fingers and aching knees began to whine, yet my mother at age 70 appeared undaunted, her eyes intently focused on the pine (See Appendix K). For me, identifying what needles to cut was work, but she was enjoying the flow of SEEING what to trim moment by moment, while all else seemed nonexistent.

For Mom, this form of artistic play is meditation. When she is pruning the pines, she can clear her mind. Feeling drawn in by the practice, she loses a sense of time, often failing to realize she has been doing it for three or four hours, and sometimes not realizing that she is in any physical discomfort until she is finished. When I asked her how this was different from trying to meditate in a class, she said, "I think taking a class, you're consciously asked to put everything out of your mind and think about your inner

[7] One could say that "Try It and See" is another play form that Mom uses to engage me (and others) in artistic play.

self, whereas in the garden, it sort of comes to you because of the beauty and the aesthetics of the garden" (Goto 2008b)

SEEING the trees requires a mental presence that is contemplative and intensely focused on the present. According to religious educator Maria Harris, contemplative imagination involves intensifying the object to grasp the radicalness of its essence (1991, 21). In this encounter, the gardener is confronting the other, in this case the tree, but with an engaged bodily presence, which challenges cognitivist assumptions that inquiry is solely mental. Instead of distancing oneself as objective modes of investigation dictate, says Harris, contemplative imagination calls for attending, being with, and existing fully in the presence of the other (1991, 21), which sounds similar to Keen's description of cultivating an attitude of wonder (1969).

Likewise, according to Arthur Zajonc, a professor of physics at Amherst College, one of the marks of contemplative inquiry is respect. He says, "[T]he first stage of contemplative inquiry is to respect the integrity of the other, to stand guard over its nature, over its solitude, whether the other is a poem, a novel, a phenomenon of nature, or the person sitting before us. We need to allow it to speak its truth without our projection or correction" (Zojonc 2006).[8] Rather than taking an intrusive detached, God's eye approach, contemplative inquiry is gentle, intimate, and participatory. According to Zajonc, the contemplative process transforms the investigator as he or she is formed by the other.

From my experience with Mom in learning to SEE the trees, I began to formulate some assumptions about what I might find in fieldwork. I assumed that aesthetic

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[8] Harris calls this "ascetic imagination," which involves distancing oneself in order not to violate (1991, 21).

SEEING in Japanese-style pruning was a contemplative, spiritual practice for the Garden Angels, which allowed a person to feel the presence of God and trained him or her to SEE aesthetically in the Japanese way.

SEEING as a Formative Practice

Fieldwork affirmed my early characterization of Mom's experience of Japanese-style aesthetic pruning as a meditative practice. As soon as I joined the Garden Angels in the garden, I noticed how quiet it quickly became. There were four of us with clippers in hand, but there was little or no talking between us, everyone so intently focused on the tree he or she was trimming.

Though he had not thought of it as meditation before I asked, *sansei* Mark agreed that working on the trees is like meditation in that it is peaceful. (The two other Garden Angels at work in the garden also called it peaceful). Mark (2008) said, "[I]t's relaxation is what it is. Because your body's free of all other senses and you're just thinking about what makes this item [tree or shrub] looks nice. And you just clip. This seems to echo Mom's experience of being able to put everything out of her mind when she prunes. Notably, Mark does not feel that aesthetic pruning is a spiritual experience, yet there is something formative about the practice.[9] When I asked whether he feels that part of him is in the garden, he answered, "I do now. Yes, because I cut that tree and I like the way [it has grown]... I get to see the way it's growing. That's my tree. It's part of me now…I am part its growth. The tree is me" (Mark 2008). Studying how each bundle of needles

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[9] I am unclear whether Mark understood what I meant by "spiritual practice," nor am I certain what he had in mind in using the term. The church members I interviewed seemed unaccustomed to talking about spiritual practices, especially those outside of what they considered "religious" or "sacred."

and each branch grows and imagining its future shape with potential pruning, SEEING becomes what Ackerman (1999) calls an "at-onement."

While neither Mark nor Mom would have described their experience of pruning as meditation unless I had suggested it, the two Buddhist Garden Angels, *sanseis* Diane and Julie, easily discussed pruning as meditation.[10] For example, Diane described how pruning is like meditation in that it keeps her focused on the process, moment by moment, paying attention to each needle (Discussion with the author, 19 March, 2009. Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church, Sacramento, California). Julie also affirmed that this practice allows her to enter into the present, for a time of contemplation. According to Julie, Japanese aesthetics are what puts her in the moment, evidently drawing her in and giving her a sense of balance, harmony, and simplicity (Discussion with the author, 19 March, 2009. Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church, Sacramento, California). As they have aged, both Diane and Julie have gained a greater appreciation for the Japanese aesthetics like they find in the Issei Garden, coming to appreciate life, the beauty of nature, and the impermanence of life. While Diane and Julie were better equipped theologically as Buddhists to describe their experience of pruning as meditation, Mom and Mark were pointing in the same direction, though their Christian formation does not give them easy categories to describe their experience. Despite the fact that meditation class was offered by Rev. Hanaoka when he was pastor, meditation remains a foreign term to church members, partly because in this context it is thought of as a Buddhist practice.

[10] SJUMC's garden is becoming known locally as a place to learn how to do Japanese-style aesthetic pruning. The opportunity to learn and to practice attracts members of the community who do not belong to the church.

In similar ways, Mom, Mark, Diane and Julie were attempting to name characteristics of Japanese spirituality that are based in Buddhism. According to Rev. Hanaoka (2008), in a Japanese garden (and I would specify a Japanese-style garden) "[w]hat happens is the observer and observed merge to become one. When you really sit quietly and relax your body and observe what surrounds you—the beauty of nature—you become part of it. The line between the observer and the observed disappears." Artist and philosopher, Frederick Franck (1973), argues that this kind of Buddhist SEEING heals the split between the me and not-me by developing an I-Thou relationship in SEEING. While in ordinary seeing a person automatically categorizes and labels all that is seen, in SEEING the viewer seeks to appreciate the essence of what is seen on its own terms, developing a relationship of respect with the other to which Martin Buber, Harris, and Zajonc refer. [11] Franck writes:

> When…I SEE -- suddenly I am all eyes, I forget this Me, am liberated from it and dive into the reality of what confronts me, become part of it, participate in it. I no longer label, no longer choose…
>
> Each leaf of grass is seen to grow from its own roots, each creature is realized to be unique, existing now/here on its voyage from birth to death. No longer do I 'look' at a leaf, but enter into direct contact with its life process, with Life itself, with what I, too, really am. I 'behold the lilies of the field'... and 'see how they grow'! Their growing is my growing, they're fading I share. Becoming one with the lilies in SEEING/DRAWING, I become not less, but more myself. For the first time being the split between Me and not-Me is healed, suspended. (Frederick Franck, *Zen of Seeing: Seeing/Drawing as Meditation* [New York: Vintage, 1973], 6-7)

Franck discusses SEEING (and DRAWING) in terms of Zen Buddhism, which seems appropriate to apply to the Issei Garden, even though the garden is located in a Christian church. In being reminiscent of gardens in Japan, the Issei Garden echoes (though not

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[11] This notion of SEEING seems to resonate well with phenomenology, in its attempt to bracket pre-conceived categories.

exactly) the spirit of Japanese gardens, which are inseparable from Japanese religions, including Buddhism but also Shinto, Confucianism, and Taoism (Goto 2003, 3). Perhaps it is then less surprising that people's experiences of at-onement in the Issei Garden can be described in Buddhist terms.

People who have spent years SEEING trees and plants as in the Issei Garden have been deeply formed by the I/Thou relationships that have developed, much like Franck describes in his direct contact with nature. For *sansei* Brian, the garden (any garden) is his sanctuary, where he feels the presence of God, and he too becomes lost in the moment when the pruning is play.[12] Speaking of an I-Thou relationship with the trees he prunes, Brian said that the trees have a soul, a belief that his *bonsai* teacher George Makashima holds. Brian (2008) commented, "It's [your job] to try to make them [the trees] happy…[W]hen they're cut or when you prune in a certain way, I think their soul is happy, and you're happy…" He went on to explain that you can tell if a tree is happy by the way it responds to the cuts made.

I have heard "Uncle" Ed speak similarly, admitting that trees probably do have souls, though he does not feel the presence of God while working in the garden. As a horticulturalist, he has developed a sense whether or not plants are "comfortable" by using his senses—inhaling to gauge how much moisture there is in the air, seeing how much light a plant is receiving, and feeling the condition of the soil. He claims that plants "tell you" what they need (Kubo 2008). Both of these views—Brian's and "Uncle" Ed's—suggest that the care of the trees and shrubs cultivates a spirituality in which the split between the me and not-me are healed or suspended, as Franck says.

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[12] Though Brian does not participate in Garden Angels because he has a full-time job and a part-time job in Japanese-style aesthetic pruning, I interviewed him because he helped to catalyze the revitalization of the Issei Garden, which I discuss later.

People like Brian and "Uncle" Ed are so in tune that they hear, see, and feel what is being communicated by the plants and trees they care for, perhaps reflecting back to them what Winnicott might say is their creativity or sense of being alive. Similarly, recall how Franck feels like he has become not less but more himself by sharing in the growing and fading of the lilies (1973, 7).

Experienced gardeners like Brian and "Uncle" Ed practice respect for the trees and shrubs in being careful not to cut too much at a time, which in turn cultivates an ethic of patience and sustainability. For Mark (2008), one of the most important lessons he has learned in tending the pines is to "stand back and see the beauty before you make another cut." In order to be sure you know what are doing, he said, it is important to stop, view the tree from many angles, and make a plan. In addition, it is important to know when to stop cutting, being patient for what is to come. Brian (2008) said, often "you have to sit, stop and step back and take a look and say, 'Oh, this is enough for now'…[A]s the seasons change you have to come back." SEEING the trees trains a person to consider the future. According to Greg, one must leave options for those to come. For example, if he prunes too much from the mid-branches today, there will be nothing to work with in the future. "Never prune yourself into a corner," he said. "You want to leave something for the next guy" (Discussion with author, 27 January 2007, Hawthorne, California). Greg warns his new clients that he does not perfect a tree for today, but rather his work may not be fully revealed for another three years.

While it might seem that the Garden Angels are shaping the trees in a one-way interaction, there is a sense in which the trees are forming the humans in a mutual relationship. According to Peter Pels, who discusses relationships with material culture,

"the 'material' is not necessarily on the receiving end of plastic power, a tabula rasa on which signification is conferred by humans: Not only are humans as material as the material they mold, but humans are molded, through their sensuousness, by the 'dead' matter with which they are surrounded" (Pels 1998, 101). Trees are hardly "dead matter," but it would be easy to objectify them and to overlook how they participate in the spiritual formation of those who tend them. In the above examples, the trees are teaching humans to practice presence, sensitivity, patience, and sustainability.

From the standpoint of object relations theory, the trees are serving as object mothers to those who tend them. As discussed above, SEEING as Franck describes it involves the disappearance of the me/not me split, which Winnicott would say are moments of merging with what is SEEN. In the merging of mother and baby, the infant believes (s)he has omnipotent control over the breast, while the breast (and mother) are profoundly shaping the baby. Object mothers, in this case trees, function similarly. It is an illusion to believe only the human is shaping tree, when in fact the reverse may also be true.

As previously noted, fieldwork affirmed my hypothesis that aesthetic SEEING in Japanese-style pruning is a contemplative, meditative practice that is spiritually formative. As a corollary, I assumed that people would experience God in the beauty of the garden, but those who do the pruning (except Brian) tend not describe it as an experience of God. I attribute this to preconceived and narrowly proscribed Christian notions of what experiences of God should be like and under what circumstances. However, I argue in the next section that encountering the trees and the garden are experiences of the holy, even if they are not named as such. But first, I discuss my other

early assumption, which was that learning how to do Japanese-style aesthetic pruning would train a person to SEE in the Japanese way, thereby connecting a person to their cultural heritage. Fieldwork revealed something more complex.

When I refer to SEEING a tree in the Japanese way, I mean using artistic intelligence (Gardner 1990) to envision its form and essence through a Japanese aesthetic, which is then expressed in pruning. For Mark, who learned how to prune trees in the Issei Garden approximately a year ago, his sense of connection to Japanese culture is from the meditative experience of SEEING, not necessarily from SEEING in a Japanese way. He said, “You’re out there working and it’s peaceful, quiet and you just think about your job and sometimes reminisce about the past. I guess that’s somewhat Japanese. That’s what we do—quiet, serenity” (Mark 2008). Mark’s comment suggests that SEEING is performing a Japanese self, however this is not necessarily SEEING the trees in a Japanese way, which takes years of practice. In Mom’s case, her ability to “SEE Japanese” is not only from SEEING the trees in the Issei Garden. She believes it comes from cumulative training in multiple Japanese arts, including *ikebana* (flower arranging), which involves SEEING plant materials and placing them according to Japanese aesthetics (Goto 2008b). For Mom, any Japanese art that requires her to practice SEEING Japanese connects her to her culture. Together Mark and Mom represent a range of experience in the way that aesthetic pruning connects them to their heritage.

For Brian, aesthetic pruning in the Japanese style connects him to his cultural heritage partly through artistic imagination. With pride, he talked about how happy he feels when a client says that having one of his trees is like having a bit of Japan in their

yard. However, Brian has never been to Japan, though it is a long time wish. His understanding of SEEING Japanese is from taking *bonsai* classes and studying the many books he owns on Japanese gardens. In a sense, he is pruning according to what he has learned about Japanese aesthetics and what he imagines to be Japanese, which might even be true of "Uncle" Ed, the current master teacher and architect of the garden. He said one benefit of the Issei Garden is that "if you want to get some inspiration about Japanese culture, you can come here and get the feeling of it in the church without going to Japan and looking at those trees in Japan. I won't say that it's exactly like a Japanese garden because I don't know. I haven't been to Japan to train and so, it's just my feeling about the garden" (Kubo 2008). In truth, recovering the heritage of Japanese Americans is partly an act of imagination and play.

Pruning toward what one imagines to be Japanese is a highly creative act in a search for what is missing. (Recall the last chapter's discussion of the lifelong search for forms to express missing experience.) Since Japanese Americans do not always know what is authentically Japanese, they must partly construct it through play and imagination. What they construct is never purely Japanese, but a reflection of their cultural hybridity, which is illustrated by the trees in the Issei Garden. Again, this is why Brown makes the distinction between Japanese-style gardens and Japanese gardens.

Unlike *Floating Saints*, the Issei Garden provides a transitional space that is available year round, year after year. Its boundaries mark it as a special place for play which is ever-present and waiting to be engaged. Since the trees and the garden are long lived, it might not be obvious how they are "destroyed" in this transitional phenomena, but they are. In its history, the garden was approaching physical destruction or at least

deterioration when it suffered neglect, yet the garden survived. On a smaller scale, now that the garden has been revitalized, there are still moments when it is easy to take the garden for granted because it is always there. Many interviewees talk about "making a point" to pay attention to the garden, which suggests that there are times when they do not SEE it. In a sense, the garden disappears during taken-for-granted moments, yet it "comes back to life" when garden returns to people's consciousness and they are engaged in its artistic play.

In summary, the revitalization of the garden has introduced a segment of the church (i.e., the Garden Angels) to aesthetic SEEING as a spiritually formative practice that has roots in Japanese ancestry—namely Buddhist roots. In this territory of play, Garden Angels are allowed to experience Japanese spirituality in a way that might not be possible inside the sanctuary. Through bodily experience, they explore and play with the hybridity of their spirituality, inherited from Christianity and Buddhism. I have discussed how SEEING the trees engages people in a form of meditation or contemplation, which invites a kind of at-onement with the trees. Surprising, mutually formative relationships develop between humans and the trees in the garden, where the trees teach important spiritual lessons as the humans shape their physical form. The garden also allows people to play at being Japanese, SEEING Japanese, and creating the Japan they imagine. In this next section, I delve more deeply into the relationships between trees, humans, and the Unexpected Holy in this territory of play sedimented with memory.

Haunted Garden

In this territory of play, the Issei Garden is a place to play with communal memory, identity, and cultural heritage, similar to the space created by ghostly martyrs. In discussing *Floating Saints*, I found Avery Gordon's notion of haunting important, and I find it helpful here, where the ghostliness of the Issei Garden is part of its character because it honors the memory of the dead. According to Kendall Brown, all Japanese-style gardens are ghosts, "apparitions bearing likenesses of the living and seen just before their deaths" (1999, 10). He argues that as pre-modern gardens in Japan have been "killed off" by modernization, they have been "reborn" in nearly every major North American city and in other parts of the world (Brown 1999). However, this is not why I believe the Issei Garden is haunted. Instead, it has to do with memory.

As discussed, Gordon says that haunting involves a merging of the visible and invisible, dead and living, present and past, and it starts with something people normally exclude, banish, or do not notice (Gordon 1997, 24). In the case of the Issei Garden, decades of neglect before its revitalization gave the garden a haunted appearance. For example, in a wedding photo taken in the garden in 1978, the smiling couple seems oblivious to what looms—tentacles of overgrown maple trees reaching overhead and weeds silently invading the dry river bed at their feet, evidence of what has been neglected and made invisible (See Appendix L). As Gordon would say, something is going unnoticed and being banished from consciousness, "a something that must be done," which is a phrase she borrows from Certeau (1997, 168). Gordon analyzes Toni Morison's novel *Beloved* set in the era of Reconstruction, where the ghost Beloved forces people to confront what they wish to ignore—the lingering evils of slavery (Gordon

1997, 172). Similarly, in *Floating Saints*, the ghostly martyrs haunt church members to provoke a response to their persecution, asking them to reconcile faith with culture. In the case of the Issei Garden, the trees are also ghosts making known a "something that must be done." I have experienced it personally and so have others.

When I was in high school, the trees in the Issei Garden seemed to cry out for care. It bothered me to the point that I embarked on a lone mission to "save" the maple trees, trying to prune them by hand as Grandma Goto taught me, though no adult would help me. (At that time, Mom was neither trained nor interested in pruning trees.) Overwhelmed by the task, I gave up after several weeks of labor, but Brian had a similar experience fifteen years later. Brian, who was learning how to prune pine trees in a *bonsai* class, noticed that the pine trees in the church garden needed pruning, therefore he set out not only to gain practice but to give the trees the attention they desperately needed (Brian 2008). "Uncle" Ed came to help Brian because there were too many trees for one person to prune, which is how the revitalization of the garden began.

Every one of us—Brian, "Uncle" Ed and myself—heard and heeded the trees. Though it may seem strange that material culture, like trees in the church garden, could have designs on us, it happens more often than one might think. Cited by Hallam and Hockey, Alfred Gell develops the notion that objects have significant effects within the social world – "[s]ocial agency can be exercised relative to 'things' and social agency can be exercised by 'things'" (1998, 17-18). (Gell's argument takes a step further Pels' notion that humans not only shape material, but it shapes humans.) When "things" have agency, says Gell, it is relational and context-dependent. For example, when a car breaks down and forces the owner to walk home, it becomes an "agent" in the context of its use,

whereas in other instances the driver becomes the "agent" when he or she controls the car (Gell 1998, 22). Hallam and Hockey cite their own an example, illustrating the agency of persons and that of material objects. While Mara exercised her agency by placing in a drawer the clothes of her son killed in an accident, the clothes seem to emanate an "emotional power" or "terrible potency" that captured Mara such that she could not yet throw them away (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 115).

Gordon discusses the agency of "things" such as photos in terms of ghosts, but for her haunting has to do with justice. She writes, "the ghost is 'alive'; we are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory out of a concern for justice, a reckoning with its repression in the present" (Gordon 1997, 63-4). In the case of the garden, when the trees were at their most ghostly, unkempt state, one could sense that there was something at risk for being lost. The trees provoked in Brian, "Uncle" Ed, and I a sense of urgency to do something. At risk of being lost was not just the trees themselves, but the memory of those that the garden honors.

The practice of honoring the *issei* who passed away and remembering what they suffered was once an organized practice. At least until 1983, the pastors of SJUMC and Parkview Presbyterian Church, another local Japanese American congregation, held Christian worship at the East Lawn Cemetery or the Sacramento Memorial Cemetery on Memorial Day (May 30).[13] While Memorial Day is a national holiday commemorating the war dead, members of these two Japanese Christian churches considered it a day for

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[13] Nakamaki writes that this Christian worship was part of a service held by various religious groups representing Buddhism, Christianity and "new religions." However, it is not clear how this was done—whether the Christians hosted a Christian service and invited others or whether it was an interfaith service. Given the time of the study (1983), my guess it was probably the former.

remembering the *issei* pioneers and the Japanese American soldiers who proved their loyalty through their military service in World War II. Following worship, they would visit the *issei* graves saying such things as, "You too struggled, didn't you," and "Now things are easy, aren't they." After the grave visiting, they would eat a meal together, and it would be enjoyable day for the *issei* (Nakamaki 1983, 266). While these practices are no longer observed at SJUMC, presumably because the *issei* are gone, the garden remains as a haunting presence of suffering that asks to be remembered.[14]

According to Gordon, "a ghost is a symptom of what is missing, representing a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also represents a future possibility"(Gordon 1997, 63-4). In the case of the *issei* and *nisei*, what was lost, what was missing, and what path was not taken are clear. A different life in Florin would have unfolded if internment had never happened. The lives of the *issei* and their children living there would have been radically different without anti-Japanese sentiment. For example, Florin was one of four districts in California that took advantage of a new amendment to create "Oriental schools" under California law.[15] Born in Florin, my grandmother Alice Yamada Goto was one of the many children to attend these segregated schools. Tending to the ghostly trees is perhaps an act of

[14] When they were still living, honoring the *issei* was a common practice in the Japanese American Christian community in Sacramento and elsewhere. In circa 1970, Reverend Hei Takarabe started a Thanksgiving ceremony at Parkview Presbyterian Church in Sacramento, which honored the *issei* who came from Japan to America as the pilgrim fathers. At this dinner accompanied with a sermon and prayer, they offered thanks to the *issei* for their hardship and for building the foundation for Japanese in America. According to Nakamaki, the ceremony was created because *issei* and *nisei* did not identify with the history of the Mayflower or the pilgrim fathers. Parkview church also observed Issei Day or Issei Appreciation Sunday, a practice that was also started in 1970 by Reverend Takarabe. For the *issei* this was a day of celebration, and the *issei* women made all the food for the luncheon; but when this became exhausting, the *nisei* women took over in 1981. While SJUMC had no official day for the *issei*, the *issei* were invited two to three times a year for potluck supper accompanied by hymn singing (Nakamaki 1983, 277-8).

[15] In 1921, the California Legislature amended Section 1662 of the California School Code to specifically name the Japanese as a group eligible for segregation in California schools. Only four small districts in California took advantage of the new law to create separate "Oriental schools." All four schools were located in Sacramento County: Florin, Courtland, Iselton, and Walnut Grove (Maeda 2000, 110).

"remembering the dismembered" (Moore 2004), another way of integrating haunting memories of communal pain into the whole of life, as discussed in the *Pottery of Tears*.

There is a sense that the *issei* to whom the garden is dedicated and the *nisei* who built it are still there, though many are gone. When Jonathan sees the garden, he sees the *issei* posing for a photo in the garden (See Appendix M). There are the Wakita's, the Gotans, Mrs. Imagire, Mr. Yamamoto—all of whom passed away long ago yet seem present. And Jonathan still sees the *nisei* as young men constructing the garden—Max Mizoguchi, George Miyai, Tom Nishizaki, and Tommy Kushi. In this haunted garden, past and present blur together. Today Tommy Kushi is barely able to walk because of his emphysema, but when Jonathan sees the garden he sees Tommy Kushi in his late forties, working hard and smoking, not letting either faze him (Sakakibara 2008). When Tom Nishizaki and Tommy Kushi are gone, Jonathan will still be haunted by their images, seeing them in the garden though they are no longer alive. In this haunted place, the living meet the dead and relive their stories, which are always at risk for being forgotten or neglected. When she sees the garden, "Auntie" May (2008) remembers her mother, who loved plants, Mark (2008) remembers his father, who was a gardener, and June (2008) remembers her father and uncle, a gardener and a master gardener. Nearly everyone I interviewed has a memory of someone living or dead when they see the garden.

In this territory of play, memory is at play for many reasons. First, the Issei Garden is an embodied metaphor for memory, making it a hospitable place for haunting. According to Hallam and Hockey, "[T]he ephemeral or fleeting nature of memories is acknowledged with the recognition that memories 'fade' or threaten to weather or die and

constantly need consequently to be 'kept alive.' That memories recede only to be enlivened later can be conveyed through the metaphorical chains of association with the visible aspects of the elements" (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 27). In this case, the natural qualities of the garden are a reminder of the paradoxes of memory—its longevity and vulnerability, continuity and transformation, and its stability and impermanence, for example in the rocks and the changing of the plants and trees with the season. Keeping the garden alive and well is an embodied metaphor for keeping alive the memory of generations past and the injustice they endured.

Second, memory is at play in the garden because the trees themselves are memory forms, reminding viewers of patterns of care or neglect. Showing me the end of a branch, Mom pointed out its wide, gnarled palm and knobby fingers, explaining that a hand forms when a branch is pruned with an electric saw. "Uncle" Ed also showed me evidence of sun and worm damage to the trees though years of neglect or improper pruning. Even though the branches are badly scarred, and he sees beauty in the damage because it shows age and experience.[16] The trees are inscribed with physical practices of past care, but also with the people who have cared for them.

Third, memory is free to play in this space because of a history of practices has embedded memory in the landscape. Tilley argues, "While places and movement between them are intimately related to the formation of personal biographies, places themselves may be said to acquire a history, sediment layers of meaning by virtue of the actions and events that take place in them. Personal biographies, social identities and a biography of place are intimately connected" (Tilley 1994, 27-28). The practices related to the garden play an active role in this sedimentation process. For example, because

[16] Field notes, March 20, 2008.

"Uncle" Ed has spent countless hours caring for the Issei Garden, Sharon thinks of him when she sees the garden. When he passes away, she and many others will still see him there, just as Jonathan sees the *isseis* posing for a photo and the *niseis* building the garden. While "Uncle" Ed and the Garden Angels keep alive the memory of those who have gone before by keeping the garden alive, they are inscribing themselves in the garden by the practices to which they dedicate themselves. "Uncle" Ed recruited Mark to take over the garden when he is gone, which can be understood as an attempt to ensure that the Garden Angel's work continues and that what has been created in their everyday performances (i.e., respect, hard work, and excellence) will be kept alive. Indeed, that is how this group of Garden Angels will be remembered.

The Issei Garden is not only sedimented with the memories of those who have tended it, but also with the memories of couples who were married in it, the children who played in it, and the people who took pictures in it. What all this suggests that the Issei Garden is haunted, not simply because the trees are ghostly matter or because the memorial garden serves a hospitable place for haunting, but because the practices of the garden perpetuate its ghostliness, as people leave behind ghostly traces of themselves. While Gordon emphasizes how haunting points to an oppressed past, the example of the Issei Garden suggests that haunting does not simply consist of injustices that occurred in the past. The suffering of the *issei* has been passed down from generation to generation, therefore haunting is not simply about the past but also about the everyday practices of those who have inherited the legacy of those who have gone before.

In the last section, I characterized people's relationship with the trees as an experience of at-onement with the trees, yet here I have described trees as ghosts and

relationships with them as haunted. Though it may seem contradictory, it points to the paradoxical nature of mystery, which provokes a feeling of intimacy as well as of otherness. Writing about Rudolph Otto's *Idea of the Holy* (1925), Gerardus Van der Leeuw comments,

> Otto has shown us the holy as "wholly other," that forces itself upon us as being of wholly other form, other origin, and other effect than everything else that is known to us…The awe which the completely other awakens in us breaks down at once into feelings of fear, of dread, of reverence, of smallness, indeed of nothingness, and at the same time a feeling of being drawn in, of joyous astonishment, of love. The holy, as Otto has taught us to see, both attracts and repels, it allows us to become aware of infinite distance and feel a never-suspected nearness. If we succeed in finding paths from the holy to the beautiful, then the beautiful will also have to call forth this consciousness within us, and will have to lead us to the wholly other. (Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston,1963], 5).

Otto suggests that art reveals the holy as "wholly other." In the case of the Issei Garden, the art of this Japanese-style garden allows people to experience the joy of being drawn in and the scent of fear of and reverence for the dead and their claim on the living. (The same could be said of *Floating Saints*.) Van der Leeuw might agree these are experiences of the holy through art, though they may not match people's churchy notions of encounters with God.

In the last section, I also discussed how pruning in the Issei Garden allows people to get in touch with their Japanese spirituality, which is informed in part by Buddhism. In a sense, tending the trees is like the Buddhist practice of offering food to the ancestors at a home altar (*butsudan*), in that both involve honoring the memory of the dead through an everyday act of devotion. Though this Buddhist practice has been forsaken and even eschewed by Japanese American Christians, experiences in the Issei Garden suggest that they still have it in their ancestral spiritual genes to honor the dead through devotional

practice.[17] Just as the dead remain in some ways “real” to Buddhists who serve them food daily, the trees (and the stories they represent and embody) have become “real” to those who are in relationship with them. For example, when one of the trees was stolen from the garden, the church was outraged. In the hole where the tree once was, one of the Garden Angels placed a wooden cross made from two pieces of wood. When the tree was stolen, something sacred was taken, not just any tree or not just a piece of equipment. It was akin to grave-robbing, a violation of sacred memory and the dead. Relationships established through aesthetic SEEING or haunting run deep.

In this territory of play, the God of the Unexpected is revealed in haunting, as in *Floating Saints*. The garden provokes unbidden memories of faces and stories to bubble up. People have been strangely drawn in or even recruited by the ghostly garden. Its powerful presence is surprising and constantly changing, as the garden breathes, lives, and grows from season to season and year to year, always presenting something new to notice. As a haunted place, the garden involves a structure of feeling, as Gordon says, in a mingling of the known and the unknown, which is exactly where the God of the Unexpected is revealed and experienced.

To this point, I have explored the Issei Garden as a territory of play as an imaginative meeting place of the living and the dead, of America as home and Japan as ancestral land. This next section explores how people in this transitional space are allowed to play with, perform, and construct a Japanese American self, particularly a male self.

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[17] Some Japanese American Christians, at least in the *nisei* generation, have also carried on the Japanese practice of memorializing the dead, for example, one year after someone has died, a tradition that comes from Buddhism.

Performing a Japanese American Male Self

Although Mom and two other women are Garden Angels, the involvement of women in the Issei Garden has been recent, limited, and exceptional. The construction, revitalization, and maintenance of the Issei Garden has been historically led and dominated by men, which is why I focus here on performing a Japanese American male self. For this discussion, I rely on interviews of two men critical to the construction and transformation of the Issei Garden. As the son of Rev. Joseph (Joe) Sakakibara, who was the pastor of the newly merged SJUMC, Jonathan is one of the church's few links to his father's ministry, and he is one of the few *sansei* who participated in the construction of the garden. A senior in high school when the Issei Garden was built, Jonathan's memory of that narrative is the longest and clearest of any I interviewed, including some of the *nisei* who were there but are now in their 70s and 80s. My second source of data for this analysis is Ed Kubo ("Uncle" Ed), who is responsible for the revitalization, redesign, and maintenance of the garden.

Using these two sources and my fieldwork, I describe how the Japanese American male self has been performed through the history of the Issei Garden, which reveals how this form of artistic play enables people to construct selves. Jonathan's and "Uncle" Ed's narratives are performances not only about themselves but about the performativity of other Japanese American men involved in the garden. Together their narratives and performances reflect three generations (*issei*, *nisei*, and *sansei*) performing a Japanese American male self. Rather than work chronologically, I address themes of male performativity in the history of the garden, including respect, excellence, and hard work. I take my inspiration for this section from Brett Esaki of University of California at Santa

Barbara, who has described the garden at the Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara as a representation of "a masculine, skilled, economically successful, self-determining Japanese American Jodo Shinshu community" (Esaki 2008, 5).[18]

In his telling of the construction of the Issei Garden, Jonathan narrated the story with admiration both for the *issei* and *nisei* generations, performing a self that pays respect to the elders, which is a traditional characteristic of Japanese and Japanese Americans in general. In addition, Jonathan's narrative concerned how the *nisei* showed their respect for their parents in constructing the garden. As indicated earlier, the garden was built to honor the *issei* of the church, who were in their 70s and 80s in 1972, the very age that the *nisei* are now. Jonathan remembered a sense of urgency to build an appropriate memorial for the *issei* while they were still alive. With the merger of two historic Japanese American churches, the *nisei* felt the garden was a way to express appreciation for this new church, which was made possible by the faith and dedication of the *issei*. Even at age 16 or 17, Jonathan participated in the construction of the garden not simply because his father was the church pastor, but out of a sense of gratitude toward the *issei*. His father, Rev. Sakakibara strongly supported the building of the garden and participated in its construction. In discussing what form an *issei* memorial should take, the *nisei* felt that a sculpture or statue, for example, would not appeal to the *issei* as much as a garden, which would be reminiscent of the beauty and aesthetics of

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[18] The garden at the Santa Barbara Buddhist Church was built by local, professional Japanese American gardeners, which makes it different from the garden at SJUMC. Because Japanese gardening, especially in Southern California, is a story about how Japanese immigrants worked toward success despite racism, Esaki concludes "…It could be said, then, that gardening represents the legacy of racism – the oppression and losses due to racism and thriving in spite of racism – for Japanese-Americans. Hence, the garden represents this larger history, as well as the intellect, skills, diligence, and economic status of the Santa Barbara community." As a memorial, the Issei Garden at SJUMC also honors the suffering of the *issei* due to racism, but there is no connection with the advancement of *issei* and *nisei* men through professional gardening.

their ancestral land. The garden was built with an intention to please and honor the *issei* (Sakakibara 2008).

According to Jonathan, the *nisei* who helped build the garden were deferential to the wishes of Mr. Yoshiyama, who was a skilled horticulturist who knew what to plant, how to plant, which rocks should be chosen, and how they should be placed. Jonathan recounted:

> [W]e had a lot of incidents where a half-ton or a one-ton piece of rock was turned an extra half turn through some great effort just because Yoshiyama-san said "U-uh. From here, that does not look natural."
>
> It's like [we say], "It looks good to us."
>
> He says, "No. no. no."
>
> And I remember all of us just grunting to just turn, "A little more, little more, little more…Yoshiyama-san?"
>
> "Mm," [he grunts with approval].
>
> And it was like, "Wow, this guy's picky." (Sakakibara 2008)

According to Jonathan no one was going to argue with Mr. Yoshiyama because he was not only the boss but the "the *issei* guy." There was a strong sense that, "This is your show Mr. Yoshiyama, and you tell us how you want these things laid out. Where do you want this rock? How do you want this turned? Where shall we plant this tree?" (Sakakibara 2008)

More than thirty years later, Ed Kubo is the new master landscape architect, and it is clear that the Garden Angels follow his directions when it comes to the garden, however the respect he receives was not automatically granted to him as it was to Mr. Yoshiyama, whose authority came from being *issei*. "Uncle" Ed had to earn the respect of his peers—other *nisei* men in the church. When the church asked him to help with the

garden when he retired, he was willing to do it on condition that he would be given control of the garden. When his ideas were met with some resistance, "Uncle" Ed hesitated to devote his time and energy to the garden until he received full backing. People began to support "Uncle" Ed's ideas after they saw the improvement they made, like the automatic sprinkler system (Kubo 2008) Today, "Uncle" Ed receives the kind of respect that Mr. Yoshiyama enjoyed, which allows him to perform the master gardener role that his predecessor played.

Spending time with the Garden Angels, I could see the respect they have for Ed Kubo. At breakfast, I saw an open seat next to "Uncle" Ed, which I knew he was saving for me. It was a signal to all at the table of his support of me and my work, since everyone was aware why I was there. After we had worked all morning, he excused people from their work, sending them to my interview room to talk with me. What I thought was going to be a one-on-one interview suddenly became a group interview with six Garden Angels, all *nisei* men. They spoke of "Uncle" Ed with respect and laughed together how they used to "butcher" the trees in the old days. Though they risked being asked potentially embarrassing or intimate questions by a young woman, the Garden Angels participated in the interview partly out of a sense of obligation. As a daughter of the church, there is a sense in which I am part of their church family, especially since Mom is a Garden Angel and I am "Uncle" Ed's "Number Two Daughter." Therefore they were performing the role of "honorary uncles," helping me with my project, and it being related to my educational advancement made it all the more an obligation.

Here the garden is a theater where traditions of showing respect and performing obligations are played out and played with. While these everyday performances could be

played out elsewhere, the garden brings people to this particular play by being a communal meeting place of Japanese and American cultures, past and present, tradition and change, as well as old and young. In this performative space, both Mr. Yoshiyama and "Uncle" Ed have engaged people in their artistic play, in which all strive together for excellence and beauty in the garden. Sometimes Rev. Nishikawa says to the men as they work (and notice he referred to the Garden Angels as men), "You know you're carrying on a strong tradition…[of] those who created this [and] who wanted all this to be a place of beauty, and so you're maintaining that" (Nishikawa 2008).

Jonathan described a unique rock that Mr. Yoshiyama wanted to excavate from a local farm and bring back to the garden. He wanted to preserve the split in the rock, so Jonathan and the other volunteers brought it back in two pieces. In the garden, Mr. Yoshiyama had the rock placed as it was found, in the form that it was when it cracked perhaps a thousand years ago or more (Sakakibara 2008). Filling the garden with rocks was not about efficiency or getting the job done. It was Mr. Yoshiyama's artistic play, in which the volunteers willingly engaged so that together they could create something beautiful. To this day, Jonathan can point out which rock in the garden is cracked in two.

More than thirty years after Mr. Yoshiyama's time, "Uncle" Ed also engages the Garden Angels in striving for beauty and excellence, in a year-round artistic play. From April through June, "Uncle" Ed instructs the Garden Angels to prune the new candles of the pine trees in three stages starting with the bottom third of the tree.[19] Rather than asking them to cut off the candles, he tells the Garden Angels to cut the candles in half to stunt the growth of the needles, giving the branches a neater appearance through the

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[19] He does this so that the bottom branches, which grow more slowly, have more time to catch up to the top branches, which receive more sun and therefore grow more quickly.

growing season. In ten days, "Uncle" Ed has the Garden Angels prune the same trees in the same way, followed by an identical sheering ten days from then, followed by a final trimming in June, when they cut off the candles completely. This is all done by hand, one candle at a time, one tree at a time. While this is an inefficient way of pruning, "Uncle" Ed argues that they are not professional gardeners but hobbyists. He said professional gardeners do not have the time to prune the slow way or the right way, but as hobbyists they have time and they are interested in aesthetics (Field notes, 20 March 2008). In this form of artistic play, the Garden Angels strive for excellence and beauty, never minding the cost in time and effort.

Throughout its life, the Issei Garden has attested to and demanded hard work and dedication. While the garden honors the sacrifice and faith of the *issei* pioneers, the garden required the labor and passion of the *nisei* who built it. Weekend after weekend, a group of about thirty *nisei* men in their forties and fifties constructed the garden, which took a year and a half to two years to build. The men hauled rocks for the garden on six weekends (Saturday and Sunday) from Seichi Otow's farm, a peach and plum orchard in Roseville, approximately 35 miles away from Sacramento. The smaller rocks were gathered from federal land near Folsom Lake (Email message from Ed Kubo to author, 6 September 2009) On each trip, Mr. Yoshiyama handpicked every granite rock, including many that were half buried. After the men worked the boulders free, they would scoop up the rock with Seichi Otow's tractor, lift it onto the bed of his truck, and somehow they would roll it off. Jonathan remembered how they accidentally dropped one rock and broke the truck bed, which was made of wood.

These days, the Garden Angels, some of whom helped build the garden, still work hard to maintain the beauty of the garden, church grounds, and buildings. I cannot help but think that working hard—doing more than saying—is how *nisei* men perform a spiritual self. Jonathan pointed out, "A *nisei* guy at this church isn't going to necessarily get up and offer a prayer, but he will show up faithfully to work at Garden Angels week after week" (Sakakibara 2008). Their dedication to do the everyday chores of the church says much about their spirituality, though most have probably never thought of it in those terms. There is no better example of practices of the everyday sacred.

For "Uncle" Ed work is a gift from God. Work to be done is not just work. He does it out of the love of work. Work signifies health—the fact that he is well enough to eat, walk, sleep, and enjoy life through the senses. It signifies a wealth, presumably because he has the privilege to work. By wealth, he means the serenity and beauty that comes with it, not just the money itself. And finally work signifies creativity because he is given the opportunity to be creative while working. Because you can work, he said you can teach. For "Uncle" Ed, it is more important to share God's gift with others, rather than keep it to oneself (Field notes, 30 March 2008). From his own reflections, it seems the work "Uncle" Ed does in the garden is intimately connected with the way he experiences God's grace and serves others because of it.

The hard work of the Garden Angels serves as a powerful, unspoken witness to the community. Their dedication does not go unnoticed. In fact, in every one of my interviews, people not only expressed appreciation for the work of the Garden Angels, it seems that their work sanctifies the grounds of the church. There are no neglected corners of the property. Every square foot is cared for and made beautiful, from the Issei

Garden to the far reaches of the church parking lot.[20] Citing the work of Donald King, Rev. Hanaoka said,

> Beauty is the highest form of spirituality in Japanese culture. And where do Japanese people see beauty? Nature. So many of the Japanese arts is re-creation of nature or at least the essence of nature--in the flower arrangement, *bonsai*, all these [building of gardens] and landscaping. They all encourage you to be part of nature and by becoming one with nature you are instantly a meditative state and I think that's the beauty of a Japanese garden. (Hanaoka 2008)

In many ways, the men who serve as Garden Angels—all of them, not just those that work in the Issei Garden—are performing a Japanese American male self, in which a man expresses something deeply held through the hard work he does for the church, while creating beauty connected to the spirit of the ancestors. The *nisei* men who serve as Garden Angels would probably never call the work they do "play." However, if what they do is a labor of love—meticulously and faithfully done for reasons sometimes known only to them—what they do is play and sometimes artistic play at that.

In many ways, the *nisei* men who serve as Garden Angels are mentoring and setting an example for the younger men of the group, though there are not many *sansei*. In his study of the Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara, Esaki finds that historically gardening at the church provided an opportunity for young men to socialize with the older men, which is how the three men who maintain the garden inherited their skills and passion for the work (2008, 25). Esaki writes, "Hence, the garden expresses the strength of Japanese American masculinity; older, skilled, employed men passed traditions down to younger men, and in the process taught respect and obedience" (2008, 32).

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[20] The revitalization of the garden and church grounds at SJUMC is unusual. The kind of care that the church grounds receive would be too expensive for most churches to afford. Therefore, it is common to see Japanese American Christian churches and Buddhist temples with Japanese-style gardens that desperately need attention. Evidently, members of the Sacramento Buddhist Church contacted the Garden Angels for advice on how to start a similar group.

Evolution of Artistic Play in the Garden

Artistic play in the Issei Garden has changed with its revitalization. Thanks to the diligent care of the Garden Angels, the Issei Garden is more formal in appearance, since the trees and plants have been meticulously manicured. The grey stones of the dry river bed have been raked to help the eye follow its path as it meanders the length of the garden. To protect the garden, there is a sign that says, "Please respect this garden. Do not enter" (See Appendix N). Posted since the revitalization of the garden in 2002, this sign alters how the garden is framed and therefore how artistic play is experienced. The garden was once a territory of play for children and adults, but today artistic play in the garden tends to be limited to adults.

All four interviewees who grew up at the church (between the ages 18-40), remember playing, running though, and spending time in the garden, and I myself have similar memories. Despite the improvement of the garden's appearance, Jennifer pays less attention to the garden than she did as a child. When she was little, the garden emitted an inviting feeling of "come and spend time with me." Describing the garden of the present, Jennifer said, "It's pretty but it's not as warm and inviting as when we were kids. We used to go in there and take pictures, things like that. And it wasn't such an issue of the kids being involved with that but now it's kind of like, "Don't go in the garden" or "Don't play in there" (Jennifer 2008). For Jennifer, the garden is a distant, pretty thing, and while a sense of reverence surrounds the garden, it has lost the inviting feeling that she loved as child.

According to Rev. Gary Barbaree, people were supposed to feel like they could freely enter the garden. Remembering the garden before its revitalization, he said, "It was built in a way that nothing else was happening except that you could go in there. It invited you in there. It was very casual and not strict at all. And that gravel is what did that because it was just ordinary, store-bought [gravel]."[21] Although it was suggestive a dry river bed, the gravel looked more like a driveway or a walkway, which invited people into the garden. Remembering how children were always in the garden, Rev. Barbaree (2008) said, "The neat thing about it is that it's a Japanese garden but it's a Japanese garden that kids who grew up at the church play in. It's not special at all to be honest with you." Of course, the Issei Garden has been transformed since Rev. Barbaree was pastor of the church. For example, under "Uncle" Ed's leadership, the ordinary, store-bought gravel was replaced by decorative, natural river stones, which are carefully raked for aesthetic effect, which would be ruined if constantly walked upon. Young parents like Alex, who played in the garden as a child, is constantly scolding his own children to keep out of the garden.

Rev. Barbaree argues that the Issei Garden has been a place where people learn to be Japanese American. He was the one to remind me of my self-appointed mission in high school to "save" the trees in the garden with a pair of sheers. For some reason, I had completely forgotten. He remembers how frustrated I was that no one would help me trim the maple trees. I was trying to prune the trees as carefully as one practices *bonsai*, he said, but the maintenance crew did not have time to approach landscaping that way. He pointed out that I was trimming the maples in the spring, but their priority was to clean up the garden for the bazaar in the fall. Nonetheless, the adults in charge of the

[21] This original gravel was upgraded to grey river rocks in the garden's revitalization in 2002.

garden allowed me to get in there with my sheers. Rev. Barbaree (2008) said, "And then what would happen is some of those old guys would come in after [you had gone] and make it [the tree] look ok. Whatever you did, you weren't going to ruin it and they would've stopped you if that's what you're going to do. Okay, so this is a really important point is that it's a place where people learn how to be a Japanese American because this is our garden and you can go in there."

Although the garden is now restricted to those care for it, the garden remains an area for Garden Angels to learn through artistic play. "Uncle" Ed considers the garden a teaching area, where the goal is not to perfect the trees but to learn from them (Field notes, 20 March 2008). He demonstrates on one tree, but everyone has his or her tree to work with season after season, where the learner can make mistakes and see the effect. As discussed earlier, Garden Angels are learning to SEE the pines, being guided by what they imagine is Japanese, and expressing through art what is authentically Japanese American.

Today, artistic play is limited to the adults who care for the garden and to adult members of the congregation who engage in SEEING the garden. SEEING the trees or the garden is what Paul Connerton calls an "inscribing practice," which is how social memory becomes sedimented in the body as habit. For example, he argues that posture, which is both gender and culture specific, is a bodily practice that one can hardly remember being taught yet it preserves communal memory, indicating patterns of authority as people show rank and deference through their bodies (Connerton [1989] 2004, 73-4). In other words, the body is schooled for social formation through an

inscribing practice.[22] As discussed above, SEEING the trees fosters artistic intelligence and trains a person for honoring what is in the past, present, and future, especially as it concerns the community.[23] For my Japanese ancestors, SEEING (in this case the trees or the garden) was more of a habit than it is for American descendents. Not only is there a dearth of people with an eye for pruning, the sign that says, "Please respect this garden. Do not enter" indicates that the current generation of parents and children lack the ancestral habit of SEEING. As the cultural background of the congregation has become mixed, the garden has taken on diverse meanings. Now more than ever, lessons in SEEING are needed.

While I have discussed at length how aesthetic SEEING is a formative spiritual practice for Garden Angels, it also engages church members in visual, spiritual formation. As Rev. Hanaoka discussed earlier, SEEING the garden involves the disappearance of the line between self and nature, the observer and observed. He wondered, "How can we incorporate that type of spirituality into the congregational urban style churches?" According to Rev. Hanaoka, church architecture should create for congregants "an instant transfer" into a spiritual space where the contemplation of nature can take place. He argued, "That's been missing in the sort of a commercialized, market-oriented Christianity that is so prevalent today" (Hanaoka 2008). Some members of the congregation have been formed by the practice of SEEING the garden, as Rev. Hanaoka hopes more people will be. For example, Frank (2008), a Garden Angel, said, "[T]to me if I just walk in there and view the garden it seems like it takes you away from all the

[22] Marcel Mauss makes this same argument in discussing body techniques. See Marcel Mauss, "Body Techniques," in *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1979.
[23] In a parallel argument, Paul Connerton makes the case that cinema is an inscribing practice that involves the social formation of the eye ([1989] 2004, 78).

hustle and busy streets. You feel like you're in a quiet place where you can worship..." In this practice of SEEING the garden, church members encounter the garden with a sense of awe and wonder that is artistic play. In revitalizing the garden, the Garden Angels have increased its visual potency, (its "stickiness" or auratic power, as Stephen Pattison says), and in doing so they have helped to revitalize the ancient practice of SEEING in the congregation.

While interaction and contemplation have always been part of artistic play in the Issei Garden, emphasis toward one or the other has changed over time. For the first thirty years of its history, the garden invited church members young and old to bring their bodies and the everyday stuff of life into the garden. It was a place where children played, couples got married, and people took pictures of themselves. One could say that the Issei Garden had more of an "aesthetic of engagement," which connected people to the landscape by engaging them in participation and discovery (Berleant 2005, 36). In more recent years, the Issei Garden has shifted toward being an "observational landscape," in which a completed scene is presented for the viewer and where movement and change in a given viewing are not significant. The scene is an object of contemplation, to be seen in the light of its mythological, religious, or personal references (Berleant 2005, 33). Today, the garden promotes greater contemplation, not only of the trees and natural elements but of the stories and narratives of those who have passed away.

The effect of the evolution of artistic play in the Issei Garden is an open question. On one hand, one could argue that the formalization of the garden has led to its "museumification," preventing the youngest generations from engaging in the play that

would help them take ownership of the garden and its heritage. On the other hand, one could argue that the revitalization of the garden promotes deeper contemplation of the garden among adults, which is re-establishing an ancestral practice of SEEING.

The hard work and dedication of the Garden Angels has led nearly all interviewees to pay more attention to the garden. "Auntie" May (2008) said that more than ever she pays attention to the garden "because you know that everything is done there…for a reason. Not just haphazardly…There seems to be a purpose in it. I love the feeling of being able to sit on the bench and just take in the peacefulness of it. When you think about the loving work that goes on every week there, it's just a wonderful feeling." This perspective suggests that SEEING in this garden is not simply about appreciating nature because it is objectively beautiful, but that the loving care shown by the Garden Angels makes the garden all the more beautiful and meaningful. Once again, this suggests how the Garden Angels' work sanctifies the grounds they work on.

Garden as Symbol

I was surprised to learn that the Issei Garden was built against the wishes of the church architect. In his original design, Wayne Osaki planned a basketball court and children's play area where the garden is today with small, Japanese-style landscape elements on the side (Field notes, 18 June 2008). Christ Church Presbyterian in San Francisco, another Japanese American church he designed, reflects the plan that he had intended for SJUMC. The architect felt that the proposed garden would be too Japanese, and therefore inappropriate for a Japanese American church. The basketball court and playground, he reasoned, would be for the children and youth, who are the future of the

church. Because the building committee and the landscape committee met at the same time, the architect was unable to defend his design to the landscape committee, which had a chair that was strongly in favor of installing a large Japanese-style garden.[24] Therefore, the landscape committee moved forward with constructing the Issei Garden (Osaki 2008).

Interestingly, later building projects fulfilled Wayne Osaki's wish for a balance between the Japanese and American cultures, the past and the present, and the older and the newer generations. Next to the Issei Garden is a gated children's playground and beyond it a hall that houses a basketball court (See Appendix O). Side-by-side with the garden, the bright blue, yellow, and red plastic play equipment might seem to clash with the Japanese aesthetics of the garden. However, just as my Japanese and American dolls belonged next to each other in my Girls' Day display, the playground and the garden represent cultural duality within Japanese Americans as well as the past juxtaposed with the future. Both are sheltered by the outer structures of the church, residing in the heart of the grounds.

As Kendall Brown argues, a Japanese-style garden is whatever people want it to be. Because their meanings are fluid and ambiguous, he characterizes Japanese-style gardens as ghosts (Brown 1999, 9). In this case, the Issei Garden symbolizes many things that shift from person to person and moment to moment. I asked interviewees what they thought the garden signifies to newcomers, who step through the front gates of the church and see the garden. To them, the garden conveys (in no particular order):

- Peacefulness, a sense of wholeness and protection
- Enticement, drawing people in to see this unique feature

[24] No one seems to remember the name of the landscape committee chair. Interviewees came up with different names.

- Wealth of the church, in its ability to maintain high standards of beauty in its grounds
- Pride in the church and its heritage
- Union with nature, reflecting the Japanese spirit
- Respect for the *issei* and remembering what they suffered
- A labor of love

In this territory of play, it is possible to play with all of these meanings, which is likely to change as the generations pass, given how the framing and people's experience of the garden shifts over the years.

Several interviewees were not certain whether future generations will recognize the garden as being Japanese or understand it significance in relation to the communal narrative of the church. Jonathan assumes that his daughters, now in their twenties, fail to appreciate the garden as he does. He has never told them how he and others hauled in the rocks for the garden, and he assumes they will respond with "So what?" (Sakakibara 2008) For his daughters, the garden has never meant what it means to Jonathan, so he assumes it means little. Granted, I interviewed young women who are the same age as Jonathan's daughters, who seemed very aware of the significance of the garden. In the end, it is unclear how the Issei Garden will be understood in the future and whether it will remain the territory of play that it has been.

Conclusion

The Issei Garden attests to the importance of creating and maintaining a dedicated, available space for artistic play, where the God of the Unexpected can be

encountered. Since the merger of the church, the garden has served as a territory of play, establishing an early precedent of using art to construct identity, memory, and meaning. The space invites all members of the church to participate—both the living and the dead, Garden Angels and regular members, and children and adults—in the practice of aesthetic SEEING. As Rev. Barbaree argues, the Issei Garden has been a place for people to learn to be Japanese American, a place where people can put themselves (either literally or imaginatively) into a cultural frame.

As discussed, SEEING is a formational practice for Garden Angels who work in the garden. By training the Garden Angels to prune the trees the traditional way, "Uncle" Ed has introduced a practice of SEEING that promotes artistic intelligence, engages a person in meditation or contemplation, promotes an ethic of patience and sustainability, and invites them to be guided by what they feel is Japanese. Not only do Garden Angels shape the trees in the garden, they are shaped by them in an I-Thou relationship, where the line between the me and not-me is healed. As discussed, the practice of SEEING is partly a recovery of Buddhist roots. In this mutual relationship with the trees, the Garden Angels are inscribing themselves in the trees, which record the care, neglect, or abuse of all those who have come before, while the trees have agency over them, demanding care and maintenance. The most experienced of the Garden Angels can not only "talk to" but "listen" to the trees, so at one are they with them.

Thanks to the revitalization of the garden, there has been a shift in the garden away from an interactive artistic play to a more contemplative one. The garden provides lessons in SEEING for adults in the church, though perhaps to the exclusion of children. Since entry into garden is restricted, the church will have to consider ways to make

children a part of the garden. Some church members I interviewed had ideas about how the garden could be used as a teaching tool for children. Interactive artistic play for children in the garden could take a different but still creative, rich form.

As a memorial to the *issei*, the garden will remain haunted because the next generation is always at risk for forgetting the heritage and suffering of those who came before. In some ways, the Issei Garden is the most brilliant kind of memorial. Some memorial practices, like visiting graves, can simply be discontinued and forgotten when people pass away, whereas the garden remains and reminds, haunting the collective imagination of the community, as Brown says. Unlike a statue or a sculpture, the garden provides a space where the living and the dead can meet, the faces and the stories of the dead remembered, and the significance of past pondered in relation to the present and future. In these unbidden encounters, the God of the Unexpected is revealed. A statue or sculpture requires no performance and therefore no investment, whereas in the garden memory is performed as the garden is revived and kept alive. Furthermore, a statue or a sculpture does not require the performance of the whole community as this garden does.

Heeding the ghosts of the garden and caring for it could be further evidence of recovering the community's Buddhist roots. While Buddhists regularly serve food, light incense, pray for those who are dead, Protestant Christians have no such practices, however serving the ghosts of the Garden is perhaps a symbolic performance of this ancestral practice. Who would have thought that the Issei Garden could be a place where Japanese American Christians could recover the Buddhist spirituality of their ancestors? This example suggests how the God of the Unexpected works through play, through the backdoors of consciousness.

The construction and revitalization of the Issei Garden is one of the great communal narratives of SJUMC, made more powerful because it is what Tilley calls a "spatial story." Tilley writes, "[T]he story is a discursive articulation of a spatializing practice, a bodily itinerary and routine. Spatial stories are about the operations and practices which constitute places and locales…If stories are linked with regularly repeated spatial practices they become mutually supportive, and when the story becomes sedimented into the landscape, the story and the place dialectically helped to construct and reproduce each author" (Tilley 1994, 32-33). With its story closely linked with the practices of the garden, it would seem that the longevity of the narrative and the garden would be assured.

However, I showed how the history of the garden is intertwined with how Japanese American male self is constructed, which is fluid. The garden has served as a theater where traditional notions of Japanese American masculinity are performed and played with. And of course, the question remains of who will continue the work of the Garden Angels. Three or four *sansei* men participate in Garden Angels, but most are working during the week and raising families. In addition, the performance of the Japanese American male self will evolve as the demographics of the church membership changes. My study is perhaps at the cusp between the *nisei* and the *sansei* or multicultural generations. The performances of the *nisei* still link to themes of the past (i.e., respect, excellence and hard work), yet an American male self of Japanese ancestry may be constructed differently in the future.

I asked every person how they would feel if there was an initiative in the church to remove the Issei Garden, and without an exception all of the interviewees opposed the

suggestion. While the garden symbolizes many things to the members of the church, all recognize its value. I was touched most of all by the passion of Brian, who said that removing the garden would be like taking out the soul of the church (Brian 2008). The possible loss of what it means to the older members, the loss of art, and the loss of time and energy invested in its care were too painful to consider.

Chapter 5
InterPlay

Though InterPlay might seem like an unusual conversation partner with Mom's art and the Issei Garden, all three concern communities at play through art of various media, being spiritually formed in the process. The Garden Angels and InterPlay share a number of parallels. In both cases, participants are creating art—a garden in one case, performance art in another—which involves contemplative experience, artistic intelligence, as well as artistic freedom. Both cases involve people who have chosen to practice and cultivate artistic play on an ongoing basis, unlike Mom's engagement of the congregation on occasion. In both cases, participants hope that what they practice will transform the wider community of which they are a part. The Garden Angels hope that the garden adds value and meaning to the church and that what they practice will be passed down to future generations. On a larger scale, InterPlayers are spreading the "wisdom of the body" as a meme that transforms the world.[1] While InterPlayers are explicitly aware of the involvement of the body in spiritual knowing, in both cases bodies come to "know" deeper truth by doing and being through the practice. Both practices of artistic play not only create physical space but mental. I have shown how the Issei Garden is both a physical place but also a transitional space, and I explore this with InterPlay as well.

InterPlayers would no doubt identify with the moment-by-moment, try-it-and-see approach of the Garden Angels, however, InterPlayers take on a task that Garden Angels

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[1] The term *meme* was introduced by Richard Dawkins in the *Selfish Gene* (1976). Cynthia describes a meme as a replicable, transmittable unit of cultural information that moves through and transforms society. She uses the image of the meme to describe how InterPlay can be spread around the world as a force of change. Cynthia Winton-Henry, email to Monday Morning Email list, June 30, 2008.

do not consciously share, which is to "play with the stuff of life," as Phil and Cynthia put it. Life experience serves as the raw material from which InterPlayers create, rather than, for example, a pre-written script as in acting. Essentially people are playing themselves.

InterPlay Context

While InterPlay is practiced in fifty cities on five continents, the movement's headquarters is InterPlayce, located in Oakland, California, approximately ninety miles from Sacramento. Unlike the straight-laced, suburban mentality of the capital city, the San Francisco bay area is a cradle of eclectic forms of art and culture, religious movements, and healing modalities. It is known for its role in birthing the gay and lesbian movement, for its concentration of seminaries and top-notch universities, and its longtime environmental consciousness. In this context, creative experimentation and integration is welcome, giving the arts and other fields edginess not found elsewhere. For example, the church-related arts community is probably stronger in the bay area than anywhere else in the country—home both to the Sacred Dance Guild and the Center for the Arts, Religion and Education. Given this context, InterPlay was more likely to be born and to thrive in the bay area than in Sacramento, which defers to the bay area for the best of art and culture. For example, Mom drives to the bay area twice a month for an advanced class in *ikebana* (Japanese flower arranging).

What is now a well-formed educational philosophy, a "life practice," and a movement with staff, a building, and resources, was once an idea Phil and Cynthia were discussing over hamburgers in 1989. At that point, they had been working together in Body and Soul Dance Company, along with Judith Rock, for eight or nine years. Sharing

a mutual interest and talent for improvisation, Phil and Cynthia envisioned developing an educational modality and performance technique where people would create in the moment. As a first step, they created a company called Wing-It! Performance Ensemble, starting with two other people, a musician, and themselves. (Debra, who appeared in the Introduction, was one of those people.) In the first few years, they used Wing It! as a weekly laboratory for developing the practice, then over time Phil and Cynthia began teaching class on the philosophy and technique of the practice. Eventually, they named it InterPlay, avoiding more limiting names, for example that referred specifically to dance or improvisation (Winton-Henry 2005)

A pivotal moment in the development of InterPlay came in 1991 on a trip to Hawaii, where Phil, Cynthia, and Judith Rock wrote the "Bodywisdom Principles," which remain a cornerstone of the InterPlay Life Practices Program. They gave themselves the task of outlining the basic ideas of what they were learning—no jargon, no theological language. According to Phil, they wrote these principles from the recognition that the more they could articulate their ideas the more access people could have to them. He said, "T]he wonderful thing about it [writing the "Bodywisdom Principles"] was that it was just in us to do that...It is part of our way of working so we wouldn't split off the philosophical work from the artistic work. We would see that as one piece, that it's very much wedded. You have to play with stuff and then from there the ideas get clear" (Porter 2005).

Despite the fact that the name *InterPlay* alludes to neither art nor spiritual practice, Phil and Cynthia's biographies suggest how their own experiences with art and spirituality helped shape InterPlay. Both founders are artists with formal training—

Cynthia in dance and Phil in textile arts, dance, and graphic design. Early in life, both became innovative leaders using the arts in mainline Protestant churches. More recently Cynthia has distanced herself from institutional religion, giving give up her ordination.[2]

InterPlay was born partly from Phil and Cynthia's recognition of a resistance to body in the church world and a suspicion of spirit in the dance world. Despite their common involvement in the church, they intentionally positioned InterPlay outside of the institutional confines of the church, giving InterPlay freedom to develop in new directions (Porter 2005). Much of their early work was teaching through the Christian networks of which they were a part, including the Pacific School of Religion and other seminaries, churches, and denominations. However, InterPlayers soon took the practice to diverse settings, including prisons, hospice facilities, schools, corporations, and mental health care facilities. Phil and Cynthia's intention was that InterPlay would speak to a wide audience, hence their decision not to use theological language in their foundational documents. In recent years, InterPlay has become more conscious of its multifaith character.

While there has been no systematic study of the InterPlay membership, I have made some general observations about the demographics of InterPlay. The most visible is that there tends to be more women than men, which is changing in some InterPlay communities. According to Cynthia, when you start with a "dancerly intention," it will fail to attract men in large numbers (Winton-Henry 2005). To make the practice more broadly appealing, they have emphasized the playful rather than the artistic dimensions of

[2] Cynthia gave up her ordination for theological, personal, and political reasons, which she discusses in *Chasing the Dance of Life: A Faith Journey* (Berkeley: Apocryphile Press, 2009). My interpretation is that the institutional church was confining and unsupportive of her as a clergywoman deeply formed by art, the wisdom of the body, and mystical experience.

the practice. The men who joined InterPlay, especially in the early years, tended to be gay, though that too is changing, where in some communities people are just as likely to be gay as straight. Cynthia attributes this partly to Phil's leadership (as an openly gay man) and their mutual openness to issues of sexual freedom and identity. As far as age, both children and seniors can be found in InterPlay, but the age of InterPlayers probably clusters toward middle age. In terms of race, InterPlayers tend to be European American, even in a culturally diverse area like the bay area. People of color that I interviewed reported often feeling in the minority and hoped for growing diversity in the future. Most InterPlayers are professional, representing a wide spectrum of occupations, but many from the helping professions, a large portion of them being ministers.

According to Phil, those who are attracted to InterPlay tend to fall into one or more of four categories (Field notes, 13 August 2005):

1. They have an arts background and are searching for language to help them grasp the spiritual dimensions of the artistic process. (Most of my interviewees had some exposure to the arts, some with extensive experience or training.)
2. They are "bodyspirit" people, who have the spiritual component in place but are trying to practice spirituality in more embodied ways. (Some of my interviewees, especially the Christian ministers, fell into this category.)
3. They come with "body issues"—a disability, issues with sexuality, or illness. For example, said Cynthia, an executive director of a non-profit has cancer, and she can no longer work as a mind moving an organization (Winton-Henry 2008). Life has pushed her to include her body. And InterPlay offers a place where she does

not have to get better, heal, or change, rather these processes can start to happen for her wherever she is, which the community and the practice affirms.

4. They tend come to InterPlay with more life experience.

Those who fall into any of the first three categories are people who have lived long enough to discover that old ways of thinking, feeling, or doing no longer serve them and are seeking a different approach to life. When they were recruiting for Wing-It! Phil found that people under thirty had the energy and the athleticism to do improvisation, but they did not have much to express because they did not have enough life experience to draw on for material (Field notes, 13 August 2005).

The spiritual and/or religious identities of InterPlayers are complex. While members of SJUMC share a common religious language and tradition, there is no "neutral" or official language to discuss spirituality in InterPlay. The subject of God (so-named) tends not to come up in InterPlay. Occasionally, Phil and Cynthia refer to "spirit," "bodyspirit," or spiritual practice, however their language is not uniformly adopted by all those who practice InterPlay.[3] God language is appropriate for some, for example those in church leadership roles. Some have incorporated InterPlay in Christian spiritual direction or discernment. However, God-language is problematic for other InterPlayers. Among those interviewed, even some of the so-called "churched" were reluctant to use the name God because it is fraught with too much institutional baggage or because they do not presume to fully know ultimate reality. This helps confirm Cynthia's suspicion "that there's a general disappointment and disillusionment about religious

[3] It is important to keep in mind that InterPlay can be a spiritual practice, but it does not have to be. Depending on the audience, Phil and Cynthia frame it differently. For example, among people with a clear interest in spirituality like pastors and seminary students, they would frame InterPlay as a spiritual practice, but among educators, they would call it an educational philosophy, and so on.

community in most InterPlayers. And if not, people are certainly aware of the limits of religious community—especially traditional [forms of religion] because it's hard to dance around, hard to laugh out loud, hard to be personal even" (Winton-Henry 2008).

From this standpoint, it seems that InterPlayers tend to mirror either Cynthia or Phil's own stances toward institutional religion—either leaving it behind or redefining and qualifying Christian practice in the traditional contexts in which they remain. Despite the differences, everyone I interviewed spoke articulately about spiritual experience—whether they described it in terms of God, or the "bodyspirit," community, the everyday sacred, or simply the experience of InterPlay itself. I found InterPlayers to be more able to verbalize spiritual experience than members of SJUMC, where talking extensively about spiritual experience is not part of the Japanese American Christian tradition. The verbal ability of InterPlayers mirrors the founders' interest and commitment to being "body intellectuals," as they first showed in drafting the principles of InterPlay in Hawaii. For purposes of discussion, I use God-language without constant reminders that InterPlayers might use other terms to express the ultimate.

I interviewed twenty-three InterPlayers, Phil, and Cynthia. Of the twenty-three interviewed, six were men, seventeen were women, four were racial/ethnic minorities, and nineteen were European American. Ages spanned from 30-88, and the average age of interviewees was fifty-three. Among those interviewed, sixty-five percent participate in organized religion to one degree or another. Almost a quarter (22 percent) of interviewees expressed rejection of the Christian tradition and/or language. Eight-five percent of those interviewed have earned a master's degree or a doctorate. Of the nineteen people whose occupations were known, all were professional. My sample of

InterPlayers included people who were interested in thinking about InterPlay as a spiritual practice. Phil and Cynthia to referred me to people according to this criteria, and that is also how I explained the focus of my project when I invited people to participate.

Framing and Intention

While object relations theory served as a primary analytic frame for previous chapters, I turn now to performance theory. Richard Bauman argues that performance is a "specially marked mode of action, one that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of communication is to be understood" (1992, 44). In his approach, "Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of communication and gives license to the audience to regard it and the performer with special intensity" (Bauman 1992, 44). In InterPlay, there is the public framing of the practice—how the organization signals to outsiders and newcomers how to understand InterPlay. There is also an ongoing internal framing, where the structure and language of InterPlay frame the actions of participants for one another. Unlike the artistic play of Mom's art or the Garden Angels, here artistic play is explicitly framed as play.

Under the heading "What is InterPlay," the InterPlay homepage says, "InterPlay is an accessible art form that anyone can do, a body-based spiritual practice that relieves stress and creates ease and a way to build community based in improvisational play" (InterPlay). In this brief statement, the practice is framed by a number of key words, including "body," "art," "spiritual practice," "community," "improvisational," and "play." The key word to focus on first is "play," since it is integral to the name of the

practice itself. In what follows, I discuss what the InterPlay name communicates in its public framing, then I discuss how a particular InterPlay form called Babbling is experienced as play[4]—both in light of Gregory Bateson's notion of the "play frame," which is compatible with Bauman's definition of performance but specific to play.

Illustrating how frames are related to premises, Bateson uses several analogies, including a picture frame. A picture frame tells a person not to use the same thinking for interpreting what is inside the frame as one might use for interpreting what is outside it, for example the wall behind the picture (Bateson 1987, 187-8). While the play frame can be explicit or implicit, it communicates "this is play," meaning "these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote" (Bateson 1987, 180). The frame indicates a kind of illusion or pretense. In the case of the Garden Angels, the border of the garden itself serves as the play frame, indicating that the garden is a pretend piece of Japan. Similarly, when InterPlay is done at InterPlayce, the location marks the space for play, however InterPlay is also practiced in adopted spaces like church basements, school cafeterias, and elsewhere. In any InterPlay setting, the play frame is established verbally at minimum, with the name of the practice indicating "this is play," however the internal language and structure of the practice are constant reminders of the play frame.

By the InterPlay name alone, newcomers can anticipate much about the practice. The name of the practice communicates the spirit of play, which Robert Neale argues is adventure, which connotes risk, chance, and something striking in nature. Neale writes, "From the conscious point of view, play happens by chance—suddenly—as an occasion

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[4] When I refer to the InterPlay form, Babbling, I capitalize the name. However, when I refer to babbling as a practice, I use lowercase.

for surprise and wonder. The adventures of King Arthur' knights, the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, the adventures of hobbits, and the adventures of small boys all reveal the thrill of the unexpected" (Neale 1969, 42). In a sense, the name InterPlay subtly warns people to "expect the unexpected," as Moore puts it (2004), while communicating the likelihood of risk or challenge involved. In common experiences of play, says Neale—whether it is learning to spin a top, playing soccer, or climbing a mountain, the results are uncertain and the play is challenging (Neale 1969, 43). Finally, by implying the spirit of adventure, the name InterPlay indicates that something remarkable is experienced in the practice. Simply by agreeing to play, newcomers can anticipate they will engage in behavior that is out of the ordinary for adults, since play (as named) is usually reserved for children in this culture. For example, it is usually unacceptable for adults to babble or not make sense.

Babbling is one of the first InterPlay forms that participants do because it is one of the most accessible. After participants form pairs, the leader gives the first person a word—a common, concrete subject like napkins, wrestling, or Halloween. The participant then "babbles" about the word for thirty seconds, talking without worrying whether they are making sense or saying something interesting. Once both partners have taken turns, the leader invites them to share what they have "noticed," an important skill in InterPlay where participants share observations and comments about what they have just experienced. In subsequent rounds, the task becomes more challenging and there is a new partner every time. For example, the leader might ask pairs to talk about a subject quickly then slowly, give pairs a made-up word, then ask pairs to speak in a made-up language (gibberish) about a particular subject.

Babbling is an opportunity to play with words, what is said, and how it is said. In my experience, it is fun to do, it is new with every partner, and it is surprising what you learn about yourself and other people. According to Phil and Cynthia, "In the process of talking about the most mundane if topics we share information about ourselves, whether it is direct or in what we say or more indirect from the choices we make about what we say and how we say it" (Porter and Winton-Henry 2003, 28). Although babbling is play, it quickly creates a sense of community as people share information about themselves in ways they would not normally. People also learn about each other in noticing, which advances the connection that was begun in listening to each other babble. In addition, according to Phil and Cynthia, participants are often surprised by what they create without the pressure of having to make sense or tell something interesting. Asking people to use made-up words and languages can help show people what can emerge unexpectedly in the moment (Porter and Winton-Henry 2003, 28-9). The surprising depth that babbling achieves is related to earlier discussion of Mom's artistic play, where her art involved the fun hook of the play form, but also involved deeper knowing.

Bateson discusses a paradox in some forms of play where the premise of the game is not "this is play" but "is this play?" While Bateson is contrasting simple with complex forms of play, his insight is helpful for understanding how the line between pretend and real often becomes blurred in play. He gives the example of a man experiencing the full sensations of terror when a spear is flung at him out of a 3-D screen (Bateson 1987, 183). The image of the spear did not denote what it seemed to denote since this is play. However, there is no doubt that the image provoked real fear, the same sensation that would have been caused by a real spear being thrown. Though Bateson does not explain

it this way, his example shows that even if something is play (i.e., that one should not treat it as real), it in fact creates something real. In the case of InterPlay, people allow themselves to babble (even in a made-up language) because they know it is play—that it does not "count" (as kids say). However, babbling creates authentic feelings and insights that are sometimes surprisingly deep. This is reminiscent of Pretending to Be on Girls' Day and in *Floating Saints*, where something as frivolous as playing pretend involves something as significant as authentication. Winnicott would say that the play between the real and not real—whether at a 3-D movie or in InterPlay—is the dynamic of transitional phenomena, as discussed in earlier examples. Whether or not a person takes seriously what the performance has created is up to the individual. For example, recall how church members have the option to "remember the dismembered" when taking communion with the *Pottery of Tears*, or they may choose not to. Similarly, in InterPlay participants are free to give weight to what they notice and experience in the practice or to let it go.

The play frame allows InterPlayers to enter more intentionally in the spirit of artistic play and open themselves to the possible benefits of the practice by providing a sense of freedom and permission to play, which is needed in a culture where play (as named) is more subject to restriction for adults than children. The importance of the play frame is revealed when InterPlayers, especially new ones, suddenly feel self-conscious or embarrassed if, for example, a passer-by is watching them. They are aware that abnormal behavior like babbling will not be understood by an uninformed viewer, who is outside the play frame and may not realize this is play.[5] Since the practice is explicitly framed

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[5] Some InterPlayers, like Wing-It! members engage in play as performance art, in which they intend to be seen and viewed by the public. In this case, the stage is the play frame, where everyone both in and outside

as play, it (along with other factors) helps to provide enough safety for participants to surrender themselves to exploring the improvisational art forms upon which the practice draws. Having the opportunity to play freely, participants can engage the task of InterPlay (i.e., to play with the stuff of their lives), knowing that anything created is play and therefore "not for real," but paradoxically it is or can be, as Bateson suggests. InterPlayers seem to be aware of this paradox because they often refer to the "sneaky deep," meaning something that starts out as fun or seemingly frivolous can lead to an unexpected insight or experience that is moving or revealing. I address this more later.

The play frame is also supported by a message about community, which in combination, communicates that "This is community play." Not only is this frame established by the fact of gathering in a public place, it is further reinforced by the format of the InterPlay encounter, for example, a class or an "untensive" (workshop). In addition, participants are asked to create with their bodies a physical frame for the practice by beginning in a circle, which allows them to see one another face to face. These cues about community promote the feeling that everyone is experiencing the emerging adventure together, including its risks and rewards. If participants feel foolish babbling, for example, they can take comfort in knowing that everyone knows this is play and everyone is doing it. As I said, this sense of communal support (i.e., knowing all are in this together and that all share the same play frame) can help participants open themselves to the possibilities of play.

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of it, understands that what is happening on stage is play. Similarly, everyone is aware that a baby crying in the audience is outside the play frame. However, the play frame is permeable. For example, Wing-It! performers can often draw the audience into the play frame, making them literally or vicariously part of what is unfolding. In the case of newcomers to InterPlay, they are usually neither ready to be viewed by those outside the play frame and to be subject to uninformed or objectifying points of view, nor do they have well-honed skills to draw people outside the play frame into it. Nonetheless, the play of newcomers is performance in Bauman's sense of the term, since they are aesthetic events to be seen by members of the group, those inside the play frame.

The case of InterPlay sheds light on the unique intention of artistic play. Usually, if I approach something with intention, like practicing piano, I would do it with seriousness and directness. Leading up to a competition, for example, I might feel that every practice session counted. While this might be true in the world of art, practicing artistic play involves a less driven, goal-oriented intention. As discussed, in InterPlay practice does not have to "count." In the Issei Garden, the task is to "try it and see," and if a Garden Angel makes a mistake while pruning a tree, it is OK. No one is fired. The intention of artistic play seems closer to the spirit of adventure, which is sought and engaged for its own sake. Yet, when combined with the message "This is community," the play frame takes on a spirit of hospitality, which welcomes, makes room for, and prepares for what is to unfold, which resonates with the spirit of adventure. Interestingly, these intertwining aspects—the individuality of adventure and the communal nature of hospitality—make the intention of artistic play powerful. An intention of artistic play is partly established by the frame, which expands Bateson's approach to the play frame. While he characterizes the play frame as a picture frame that sets the premise for a performance to be understood, I would argue that the role of the play frame (or community play in this case) plays a more active and ongoing role in supporting and even guiding the intention of the participants.

Creating a Self

In this section, I explore how InterPlay creates a self in order to draw some conclusions about the formation of self in artistic play. In the last chapter, I discussed performances of Japanese American male selves in relation to the Issei Garden, which

was an analysis of performativity or how people perform roles and occupy states in everyday life (Goffman 1959). Here the focus is on performance as defined earlier, as a communicative, aesthetic event. A performance theory approach is common in ritual studies, where a scholar engages in ethnographic fieldwork to analyze the self created by ritual, made possible by both context and habitus. For example, studying lament in the mourning rituals of the Inner Mani, C. Nadia Seremetakis (1991) documents how performances of lament allow women to resist oppressive social structures and validate truth through pain. Drawing on performance theory in ritual studies literature, I first discuss the possibility of InterPlay as ritual.

In the very least, InterPlay has some aspects that are ritualized. For instance, every session starts with the InterPlay Warm Up, a led series of stretches, vocalizations, and movements. This is followed by various forms chosen by the leader, but each form has a particular script developed by Phil and Cynthia. InterPlay leaders are trained to recite this script, with slight variation allowed, in order to introduce each form. All this is evidence of ritualization. According to Tom Driver, "To ritualize is to make (or utilize) a pathway through what would otherwise be uncharted territory" (1991, 16). Since they are patterned and repetitive, ritualized behavior can serve as signaling devices, able to store and transmit information across time and generations (Driver 1991, 26). In the case of InterPlay, the forms' scripts were ritualized to standardize the forms and to facilitate the dissemination of Phil and Cynthia's wisdom and experience of teaching InterPlay.

InterPlay is somewhere between ritual and theater, between efficacy and entertainment along Richard Schechner's continuum (2003, 130). In his approach, performances whose purpose is efficacy display the characteristics of ritual, while those

whose purpose is entertainment show the marks of theater. According to Schechner, no performance is purely one or another, which is the case with InterPlay. At times, InterPlay leans toward theater in that the practice is mainly for those present as opposed to being for an absent other, though some InterPlayers do experience mystery in the process. Like theater, it involves creating in the moment, with an emphasis on the now rather than being in symbolic time. And as in the case of theater, InterPlay participants are conscious of what they are doing as opposed to being in a trance state. At other times, InterPlay looks more like ritual in that participants believe the authenticity of the performances they are watching, since people are playing themselves as opposed to acting. While participants are encouraged to appreciate what they see ("looking for the good"), it is the reality of the performance that is appreciated, not necessarily the quality of its showmanship as in the case of theater. As in ritual, criticism is discouraged in InterPlay. Located squarely in the middle of Schechner's continuum, InterPlay is both efficacious and entertaining in that the practice can be fun and/or it can yield results, which is related to the play/not play (or real/not real) fluctuation discussed above. In addition, it involves both collective as well as individual creativity, combining aspects of ritual and theater.

In her case study, Seremetakis focuses on a numbers factors to explore the self created through performance, but here I name a few that will contribute to my analysis. To understand a ritual she pays attention to spatial arrangements, singing techniques, nonverbal acoustic communication, improvised poetic discourse, body movement, and the arrangement of material artifacts (Seremetakis 1991, 11). She also considers the performed text of narratives of those she interviews, analyzing a performance about a

performance. For example, she finds that every narrative about preparing the dead for burial is slightly different, revealing not only the performance itself (as in how the ritual is done) but also something about the teller herself (e.g., that the teller has fulfilled the dying wishes of the deceased.) Accounts show the teller's attention to detail and the care given to burial preparations (Seremetakis 1991, 66).

Seremetakis, who pays attention to space, bodies, sounds, and singing, inspires me to reflect on a basic form in InterPlay called Walk, Stop, Run (WSR) in light of performance theory. Because InterPlay is improvisational, I cannot predict exactly what happens in a given form, but I can identify the self that the form intends to create by examining its script and considering what often happens. While babbling is a precursor to storytelling, WSR is a preliminary form of dance. Following the script, the leader invites participants to walk in any direction, abruptly change directions, walk in an unusual way, run, and say "thank you" if they bump into someone. WSR invites participants to transgress norms of adult behavior much like Babbling, except this form challenges traditional patterns of movement, speed, space between bodies, and even eye contact. For example, normally adults do not run indoors, especially after years of being scolded as children for the same behavior. In everyday life, adults usually do not walk backwards. This and other InterPlay forms create a self that is free (and brave enough) to play with "normal" behavior and with social rules about space, for example that people should avoid touching or looking at those just met.

In groups of experienced InterPlayers, improvisation in WSR moves beyond walking, stopping, and running to more complex forms of movement and contact improvisation, where participants are following and leading each other, sometimes

lifting, leaning upon or swinging one another. Mini nonverbal stories unfold as couples or small groups coalesce, interact, and disperse spontaneously. In this more complex version of WSR, the form creates selves that are empowered to go beyond the script, able to create something based on what is unfolding in the group, and willing to test what is possible in the given space and configuration of people.

Every basic form has a script, and each develops aspects of an InterPlay self. Babbling, WSR, and other forms emphasize claiming a fullness of self that can embrace the widest possible range of expression through movement, stillness, sound, and voice. Referring to this experience as being "big," Phil explains that most contexts call for speaking in a narrow range of volume, however practicing being loud, for example, allows people to claim their ability to go beyond these limits so that they can experience more of themselves (Porter 2005).

The way that InterPlay introduces participants to a wider range of expression and feeling is similar to Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992). In Boal's work, many preliminary games have to do with the de-mechanization of the body, re-tuning the actor so that she may take on the mechanizations of the character that she is going to play ([1992] 2002, 30). This process involves not only becoming aware of one's habits, but relearning to perceive emotions and sensations one has lost the habit of recognizing. Many of the games require actors to take on the character of others, such as the oppressors, even to the level of physical mannerisms. Boal's assumption is that by becoming "the other," actors experience a new, challenging range of emotions that they try to understand. In Boal's work, there is the assumption that emotions and sensations are interwoven and that in understanding an emotion there is a simultaneity of feeling and

thinking ([1992] 2002, 49, 36). Boal would probably agree with Phil and Cynthia's notion that play "unlocks the wisdom of the body," a transformative knowledge gained by exploring physicality. This deliberate approach moves beyond the unexamined, experiential learning that happens automatically through a practice, as in the case of pruning trees.

With a fuller range of expression, InterPlayers eventually engage in more complex improvisation that combines multiple forms involving story, sound, and movement, resulting in performance art. Participants (even those new to the practice) are often given the opportunity to perform solo improvisation. However, at one end of the scale are those who practice for the sake of the experience itself—often people who have no experience as performing artists, while at the other are those interested in the craft of improvisation—often those who love to perform and have been performing for many years. Cynthia refers to the former as "folk art," while I would call the "performance art." In a moment, I describe performances that illustrate these two types. In both cases, solo improvisations are an opportunity for participants to construct a self, being that is created through doing and showing. And simultaneously, the performance creates a community able to receive, appreciate, and gain insight from what they have seen.

Toward the end of the Women's InterPlay class, participants are invited to perform either solo or in groups, while the rest of the class gathers at one end of the room, clearing the floor for performance. I was participating in the class that Cathy, a woman in her fifties who was relatively new to InterPlay, performed a Big Body Story, which combines both movement and story. In the piece, Cathy told the story of how childhood rules of behavior put her in a safe, little box. As she named the "don't do's,"

her body became smaller and more compact until she was finally in the shape of a ball on the floor, her voice barely audible. However, in InterPlay she discovered how much fun it was to twirl and to scoot across the floor, gleefully doing both as she spoke. Following Cathy's solo, the group shared what they noticed and what they appreciated in what they saw (Field notes, 9 June 2008). Reflecting on Cathy's performance, Sophia (2008), a leader of the class, told me, "[W]hen Cathy did her piece about getting out of her little, safe box I went, 'There we go. That's what I'm here for.'" As an InterPlay leader, Sophia's goal is to let people be seen and heard, providing both permission and affirmation. In her opinion, "We don't get that opportunity just to be fully who we are and be not judged" (Sophia 2008).

While Cathy had never before performed solo, Susan (age 88) has performed professionally for much of her life. As a young woman, she studied and danced with the great modern dancers of her time, including Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Martha Graham, and Tanya Holm. To this day, she loves to perform. Also a member of the Women's InterPlay class, Susan performed the story of Harriet Tubman, a solo that others still remember and discuss. In the original version, recounted to me by Lee, Susan played two parts—Thomas Jefferson and Harriet Tubman.[6] In the performance, Susan said, "Thomas Jefferson was a great man." She described how he collected many, many books, built a library, and hired architects to design his house. Then moving from his body language to the ground, Susan said, "Harriet Tubman led her people out of slavery." Creating this contrast back and forth, she said, "Thomas Jefferson had libraries and

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[6] Though I did not see the original performance, I have seen a taped version of it reprised for a public show by the Women's InterPlay class called "Women's Wisdom." In the piece, Susan evokes the story of Harriet Tubman in her movement, gestures, and narrative text. In her sparse style of poetry, she repeats phrases "Twenty-six times" and "Help the little one," as she slowly journeys across the floor, guiding an unseen child with her arms.

books, and he had incredible architecture, but he never freed his slaves." Ending the piece, Susan was on the ground and reached out her arm saying, "Harriet Tubman knew true North." After seeing Susan's performance, Lee reflected on what it means:

> What are the things in our lives that enslave us? What are the slaves that we don't release in who we are—the things that we hold onto—books and architecture and all the ways we create our own persona, our sense of who we are?
>
> …[S]ometimes they are beautiful expressions and yet do they hold us in slavery? Do they keep us enslaved? He [Thomas Jefferson] never freed his slaves. Harriet Tubman knew true North and she was a woman who let go of everything and risked her life over and over and over…to do the Underground Railroad. So, I've reflected on that a good bit. What are the things I really do need to let go of in my life? (Lee 2008)

In creating a one-time performance, Susan created not only something lasting for herself but for her audience, as Lee's reflection suggests. Both Sophia and Lee identified this performance as a powerful moment they experienced in InterPlay.

In Cathy and Susan's cases, the performance created a self willing to risk being seen for the possibility of being affirmed. While all participants recognize "this is play," performances in InterPlay still matter in that real life stories, experiences, and insights are being shared by those who are performing. In the vulnerability of truth telling, there is some risk in being revealed. Participating in the adventure of this form of artistic play, Cathy and Susan were creating something in the moment, but neither could predict exactly what would be created in the end. Edward Schieffelin argues that every performance, whether it is ritual or theater, is inherently risky, never exempt from the possibility of failure. At stake is the evocation of symbolism, the heightening of emotion, and the sense of transformation (Schieffelin 1998, 197-8).

In the case of InterPlay, the stakes are real but not so high since no InterPlay performance can truly fail. Cathy or Susan performances could have been less

meaningful for themselves and/or their audience, but all would have been well even if they had failed aesthetically or practically because (after all) "this is not for real." Despite the risks, by performing solo Cathy and Susan opened themselves to the possibility of being affirmed by their audience. Both marginalized for different reasons, the child Cathy was cut off from her full expressiveness, while Susan at age eighty-eight had difficulty finding a place that would accept a dancer with her physical limitations. Unable to sense her feet, Susan is at constant risk for falling. However, each woman created and performed a self that moved beyond these limitations and external definitions, and each received affirmation of the self created.

According to Barbara Myerhoff, people make sense of themselves by "rendering visible actual and desired truths about themselves and the significance of their existence in imaginative and performative productions" (1986, 262). In other words, through performance people define themselves. In Myerhoff's study of a senior center in Venice, California, she found that residents denied their ascribed status as useless and voiceless seniors by staging a protest against high traffic on the boardwalk that faces the center. Creating a theatrical spectacle, including a coffin on parade, the seniors captured media attention, which led to public pressure to erect barricades. Myerhoff says, "They displayed and performed their interpretations of themselves and in some critical respects became what they claimed to be. By denying their invisibility, isolation, and impotence, they made themselves be seen, and in being seen they came to being in their own terms, as the author of themselves" (Myerhoff 1986, 263). Myerhoff suggests that agency is not only made possible through the context of performance, (e.g., the safety of the black-box space), but through the enactment of performance itself. Much like those who tell life

narratives, the seniors in Myerhoff's study were engaged in the construction of self as they were performing these definitional, symbolic acts.

Implicit in Myerhoff's argument is that performance allows people to "show themselves to themselves," however Serematakis' work suggests that there is more to creating a self than being seen, rather it has at least as much to do with embodying a self. Seremetakis documents how women create selves through the performance of pain, which is both physical and emotional. Mourning is not merely seen but felt, and that lived performance shapes the women Seremetakis studies. Her data reveals that her subjects come to know something in their bodies, a point I return to in a moment. Despite a difference in emphasis in their approaches, Myerhoff and Seremetakis would agree that performance results in a sense of freedom and agency for those involved. Cathy's piece was about finding freedom through InterPlay, and similarly Susan's performance as Harriet Tubman gave her a sense of freedom and agency, as she recognized she was creating something significant for herself and others. When she performs, she said, "You can see their eyes [the eyes of people in the audience] change. You can see their expression change. They just give so much to me. And I can see that I'm giving so much to them with a real change going on in both of us —everyone in the audience and also in me" (Susan 2008).

Describing Cathy and Susan's performances, Sophia and Lee were sharing with me what they "witnessed." A practice within the practice of InterPlay, witnessing involves looking for the good or the gift in what is being presented. InterPlayers are explicitly trained to do this. Therefore in witnessing a solo, the audience is watching, not with the eyes of a critic but with appreciation, generosity, and openness. In recounting

the performances they witnessed, Sophia and Lee were also creating and performing selves. As Seremetakis discovered in her analysis of narratives by the Inner Mani, the reporting reveals as much about the teller as it is about what is being described. In this case, both Sophia and Lee discussed unexpected insight gained from watching the solos. Sophia described a "there-we-go" moment, when Cathy's performance affirmed why she teaches InterPlay. Lee described reflections about freeing her internal slaves inspired by Susan's piece on Harriet Tubman. In the telling, Sophia and Lee created selves that are sensitive and aware, able to identify truth, and allow the truth to provoke further insight.

Up to this point, I have used performance theory as my primary analytic lens, however I now turn to object relations theory as a second tool. In his theory, Winnicott discusses "mirroring," as a key practice of mothering that fosters the infant's creativity, even before being presented with a transitional object. In being held and handled satisfactorily, the baby sees him or herself in the mother's face, as the baby would a mirror. According to Winnicott, when the mother is looking at the baby, "what she looks like is related to what she sees there" (1971, 151). For example, a baby smiles and the mother smiles back. However, if babies fail to have enough experience of looking and seeing themselves, failing to get back what they are giving, Winnicott says their creative capacity begins to diminish, and they must look for other ways of getting back something of themselves from their environment. Striving to be seen (first by mother and then by others), writes Winnicott, is the basis of "creative looking" (1971, 154). Over a lifetime, an individual undergoes a long process that depends on being seen: "When I look I am seen, so I exist. I can now afford to look and see. I now look creatively and what I apperceive I also perceive. In fact, I take care not to see what is not there to be seen

(unless I am tired)" (Winnicott 1971, 154). Winnicott gives several cases from his practice of adult patients struggling to be seen in a way that makes them feel they exist.

In light of Winnicott's theory, Cathy and Susan's performances were experiences of being seen by a community that reflects back to them something of themselves. Looking creatively, as Winnicott would say, Susan describes the feeling of looking into the eyes of people in the audience, receiving a sense of both herself and them.[7] However, it is not only her looking that is involved—the InterPlay community is trained to witness and watch with affirmation. My own experience of being witnessed is that InterPlayers often nod or quietly murmur expressions of understanding or empathy, which signal the kind of mirroring that Winnicott discusses. The notion of the InterPlay audience serving as a mirror is not far from Winnicott's belief that psychotherapy "is a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings,...a complex derivative of the face that reflects what is there to be seen." He says, "I like to think of my work in this way, and to think that if I do this well enough the patient will find his or her own self, and will be able to exist and to feel real. Feeling real is more than existing; it is finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat for relaxation" (Winnicott 1971, 158). Interestingly, if I paraphrase Winnicott's theory as "I am seen therefore I am," as Christine Wenderoth puts it (1982, 145), it is related to Myerhoff's notion of performance as a showing and gaining agency by being seen.

Winnicott and Myerhoff point to the relational quality of performance, in that being seen requires being seen by someone, especially important for communal forms of artistic play. However, it is not being seen by just anybody. Rather it is being seen by

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[7] This is a good example of what I discussed in an earlier footnote, where a skilled InterPlayer draws the audience into the play frame so that people feel connected to her.

sympathetic, appreciative eyes whether they are inside or outside the play frame. For instance, InterPlayers can mirror for each other as they are doing, for example, WSR, when all participants are inside the play frame. In Myerhoff's case of the protesting seniors, their performance generated sympathy and validation for their concerns in the community, which was outside the play frame. However, the more inside the play frame viewers are (e.g., eye to eye as Susan describes) the more intimate the mirroring becomes, closely resembling the mirroring of mother and baby.

Moving on from the above discussion of being seen, I now return to Seremetakis' work on what the body knows in performance. I watched Elizabeth perform a powerful Big Body Story during a Wing-It! practice. As the director of a dance company, a member of Wing-It!, and a performer for many years, she is interested in the craft of InterPlay performance art. Through movement, poetry, and narrative, she performed the story of a mountain climbing trip. Reflecting on the experience, she said, "[Y]esterday I did a Big Body Story in Wing-It! around my mountain climbing trip, and I tried some things that I haven't done before. I included some poetry—my very own. And there was a sense of deep grounding in my body which told me that what I had created was good…But there were also smiles or sighs or head nodding or facial expressions that also told me that I had created a transforming experience for someone else" (Elizabeth 2008).

While Elizabeth received visual affirmation from those watching her, she realized in her body that she created something new, daring, and moving through her performance. She went on: "I was surprised by my own fierce commitment to the movement within the story. I feel like that was a level of involvement or investment—a level of investment that I hadn't necessarily put into something that's a practice. That's

not on stage or not really for a real audience. So, I think sometimes in practice, I hold back because maybe I have some pictures around performing. I only put on performing energy when there's a bigger audience" (Elizabeth 2008). Elizabeth learned something new about herself through her "fierce commitment to the movement," noticing her way of being in that moment. In her mind, she made the distinction between performing "for real" and during practice, which she thought did not count because it was neither on stage nor for a "real audience." However, this time she was surprised when what was supposed to be practice play turned into real performance art, which again is the paradoxical nature of the play frame. She came to know this not by thinking about it, but by experiencing the intensity of her body's energy in performance.

Taking an existential phenomenological approach to dance, Sondra Horton Fraleigh sheds light on what the body knows through dance. She writes, "To experience the dance is to express the lived body in an aesthetic (affective) transformation…All performing artists are embodied in their art, but the dancer most clearly represents our expressive body-of-action and its aesthetic idealization" (Fraleigh 1987, xvi). Elizabeth's performance illustrates well Fraleigh's point—her dance emerged from the lived experience of mountain climbing, transformed into an aesthetic idealization. Fraleigh continues, "Thus the art of dance draws upon the meanings we attach to our bodily enacted existence as a whole, as these may be made to appear in movement" (1987, xvi). Interestingly, people do not gain access to these meanings by cognitive reflection, says Fraleigh. The "body-subject," which refers to the body "lived wholistically and prereflectively as the self," is sensed in dance through the dancer when she is unified in action (1987, 13). When she is "living the present-centered movement in her dance," the

dancer experiences the unity of self and body in action (Fraleigh 1987, 13). This may explain why Elizabeth's performance surprised her, giving her access to insights she could not access except through dance. While Myerhoff argues for gaining agency by being seen, Fraleigh's work agrees with that of Seremetakis—that the self gains agency in the being and doing of performance. In the case of dance, Fraleigh argues, "As we express our embodiment in dancing, we create it aesethetically and experience it more freely" (1987, 19).

There is more to the self created in InterPlay than I have discussed here, but I have tried to identify key characteristics of the InterPlay self. They would include a self willing to take risks, to play with the boundaries of the conventional, to create in the moment, to explore physicality, to be seen and known by the community, to receive affirmation of one's honest expressions of self, to affirm others through mirroring, and to know the self through the body. While there are qualities of the InterPlay self that are unique to the practice, a few may belong to artistic play in general—the willingness to risk, to dabble with the unconventional, and to create in the moment. In the next chapter, I revisit these characteristics of artistic play in all three cases.

The creation of the InterPlay self attests to the efficacy of the practice, however it is also achieved through entertainment, returning to Schechner's ritual-theater spectrum. Not only does this suggest that artistic play is an effective spiritual practice in general, it sheds light on how and why play in particular is a key to its efficacy. What is remarkable about the self created in these cases of artistic play is that the self is formed through a communal process. In some ways, being able to risk, dabble with the unconventional, and create in the moment are more challenging in community simply because it involves

more people, but perhaps being in community magnifies the transformative potential of artistic play. Not only are more people affected, there are more creative resources at hand with which to create and more avenues for imagination to pursue.

As discussed earlier, as people perform a self through the practice, they gain spiritual knowledge about themselves. However, I turn now to what they also learn about mystery in the process of creating.

Surprise, Surrender and Serendipitous Creativity

InterPlay is based on the belief that making things in the moment is a spiritual practice, which sheds light on the connection between creating and spiritual knowing that is characteristic of artistic play. In the Issei Garden and InterPlay, the things being made are visible or audible, even if ephemeral, while in the case of Mom's art church members are creating with their minds. In the next chapter, I discuss imagination and creativity across all three cases. The focus here is on improvisation and the experience of mystery, beginning with what Gordon Kaufman (2004) calls "serendipitous creativity."

Kaufman, who writes on the mystery of God, proposes that people reflect on God, not as an anthropomorphic being like Lord or Creator, but as serendipitous creativity, which characterizes evolution itself. Though one can identify some necessary conditions that make possible some processes like evolution, how creativity happens remains a mystery (Kaufman 2004, 56). In his theory, creativity is "the coming into being through time of the previously nonexistent, the new, the novel" (2004, 55). All creativity is serendipitous in that more happens than one would expect. He gives the example of a group conversation, which takes on a life of its own, for example, as one person's idea is

expanded upon by another, then taken in a different direction by another. As Kaufman points out, different responses are called forth from the different hearers, and the conversation proceeds and grows in ways that no one could have predicted.

While Kaufman describes an audible group conversation; Walk, Stop, Run, works under the same dynamics, where the group's nonverbal interaction through movement creates something no one can plan, which is greater than any one participant's contribution. In WSR, individuals feel their freedom and creativity extended through participation in this social process, just as they do in a verbal conversation as Kaufman suggests (1993, 277). How a person participates in and contributes to the creative process (or not) is up to the individual, however the interaction of all participants can create something u/Unexpected.

InterPlayers often speak about creativity as a spiritual experience. Coke (2008) said:

> I think God is creativity. When I experience creativity, I feel like I'm in a sacred state of being--...like measuring time and worry go away. It's just interest and intrigue and wanting; it's hunger and it's feeding. When I'm in a space of creativity, I feel such joy and challenge, like that edge that's life. I feel most alive when I create.
>
> …I feel most together, most in union with God when I'm daring to create, just even noodling around in my head in my imagination. I really don't feel alone. I feel meant to be imaginative. I mean look at us. If God isn't imaginative, I don't know what God is. [Laughing] So for a scientist, God may be deep and exquisite in a whole other way. In my creative life, in performing or writing or whatever, I feel so supported. I feel so pushed and pulled, like beckoned and invited and urged.

Coke echoes both Kaufman and Winnicott in thinking of God as creativity and saying that she feels most alive when she creates.

Coke's sense of participating in the creative process called God is shared by other

InterPlayers. Influenced by the philosophy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a Jesuit palentologist, Connors explained me that Teillard understands God as creation, a view that makes sense to him. Connors (2008) said, "It's [creation is] emerging all the time and [is] kind of spiraling upwards to this greater creation that we are ourselves. And it does not happen outside of our own selves. It happens within us." This view is similar to Kaufman's theology based on evolution and teleology. Connors added, "We are making God and God is making us. It's a total circle relationship that's evolving and pushing us forward as in [the] birth [process]." Interpreting InterPlay in light of this view, he continued, "What I feel like happens in InterPlay is it formalizes it [the creative process]. It [InterPlay] acknowledges it. It bows down before it" (Connors 2008).

A slightly different view that other InterPlayers hold is that they are co-creators <u>with</u> God, as opposed to participating in the creative process that <u>is</u> God. Nancy told me, "What InterPlay allows me to play with and take out into the world is being a co-creator with God." When I ask how so, she said, "InterPlay is about... [t]rying things one way and then doing it another way and seeing what happens. I think that's the process of creating and being an artist… If I'm out in the world creating, and God has created the world or is creating the world through us, then I'm a co-creator" (Nancy 2004).

Nancy's view seems to resonate with Marcia's theology as an artist, which has been strongly influenced by process theology. In Marcia's mind, "Rather than a closed theological system, process theology's very undergirding is that of ongoing creativity. It is the creative nature of the holy and our own imagination (made in the image of God) that offers possibility, hope, restoration, and sense of the 'never-ending' and of God's infinite lure toward the good" (Marcia 2008). It is striking that all these InterPlayers—

Coke, Connors, Nancy and Marcia—share a sense that creating (in InterPlay or otherwise) is godly, and that in creating they are doing what they are meant to do.

Moving to greater specificity, I turn to people who reveal what creating in the moment allows us to know about divine mystery and how people become receptive to it. For Phil, the artistic process itself puts him in touch with the mystery of God because in making art "we play with the building blocks of creation." As an artist, said Phil, you play with shape, line, color, and space, the fundamentals of creation itself that inspire a sense of wonder and awe. Phil continued, "[F]or me it's just mysterious that when I mix the blue dye and the red dye it turns purple. Who needs anything more than that theologically at some level? It's just a mystery. And it's pretty. [laughs] It's a beautiful mystery" (Porter 2008). By witnessing the miracle of mixing blue and red, Phil participates in and is coming to know the mystery of creation at its most basic level. As he mixes color over and over, he returns repeatedly to this mystery, which never ceases to inspire awe and wonder, despite his knowing what transformation will occur.

His engagement with color reminds me of the way that Christians return again and again to the mystery of the Eucharist. In both cases, mystery can be anticipated but never reduced to explanation, and mystery is revealed without human intervention. I draw another parallel with the Garden Angels, who are also dabbling with the "building blocks of creation" in playing with the lines and growth patterns of trees and plants, which involve shape, line, and space. They too return again and again to the same garden, seeking to play with the mysteries of nature, which they cannot fully predict nor explain.

Because the art of InterPlay is improvisation, the unexpected is bound to occur,

yet many describe it as an encounter with mystery. For example, according to Debra (2008), when an InterPlay group performance has flowed, the improvisation feels complete and connected—that performers were of the same mind and that it all made sense. Debra attributes this to a "unifying force" that seems to have "just happened," linking the performers and the audience in a "mystical union" that gives everyone a shared sense of the whole. As an example, Debra described an early InterPlay performance in San Francisco, where Phil took the stage and was telling a Big Body Story about sewing, when a button fell on the floor and rolled toward him. Providing the perfect ending, he said, "Oh, a button—more sewing!" The button was a surprise element that became wrapped into the whole, making it feel complete, striking, and unexpected. Debra (2008) explained that such performances make a person think:

> "Where did that [button] come from? Wasn't that amazing how that little bit, whatever that little bit was, turned into something bigger? And somehow hung together?" This was a beautiful experience for the performers, but there was a sense in the space as well that there was something larger happening…It did cohere…[T]hings in our life don't always hang together. They seemed disparate and don't cohere, but somehow, in the great mystery of God, our lives cohere. It's all in the coherence. It's the same kind of thing.

In Debra's account, she attests to the surprise of serendipitous creativity and of participating in something larger than herself, a force that brings an unexpected coherence to what is unfolding.

Some experienced improvisers have come to trust the Unexpected Holy. Sharon, who has performed improvisation on her own for many years and more recently in InterPlay, speaks passionately about trusting the creative "impulse of love" that calls her to surrender to the unknown of improvisation when she performs. When I ask her why she sees spiritual value in this, she said:

> In simple Twelve Step spirituality, their slogan is "letting go and letting God." It's the whole surrender process to the unknown for me, which is at the heart of surrendering to the mystery and [giving up] my ego or my intellect or whatever it is [that] is always wanting to question me, "Oh, no, no, no, that's not appropriate" or "Oh, my gosh—what will the president of Holy Names University say if you just burst in on our meeting?" So it's about the surrender as a necessary spiritual component—to know that I can trust...the inner impulse of love that says, "Just do this and I'll take care of the rest." …[T[he surrender is to surrender my own beliefs about how this [performance] looks or if this works or if—whatever. It's a leap into the trust, but I have to let go. And again it's at the heart of my spiritual journey. (Sharon 2008)

When Sharon performs improvisation, she tunes into the voice of mystery that says "Just do this and I'll take care of the rest." She describes how to detect and participate in serendipitous creativity—by listening, trusting, and surrendering to "the inner impulse of love." Sharon clarified what is at stake for her—what she is risking for:

> [I]t's not just surrender into the void or the nothingness, but it's coming to learn or become acquainted that the surrender into is into the laughter, into the fun. Actually, it's into the love in terms of the deeper spiritual journey for me. So, that is not just into [danger]—[like] you're gonna fall on your face…[E]ven if I feel like a fool, the surrender is into the being held. And it's far more laughing or far more fun than anyone ever taught me to believe. (Sharon 2008)

Sharon said that surrender is for the sake of making way for the laughter and fun that she could not have imagined earlier in life. Surrender is for the sake of becoming or "being held" as she described. In many ways, Sharon illustrated well Nancy and Marcia's notion of being "co-creators" with God in the artistic process. Sharon is agreeing to her part by surrendering to a creative, "inner impulse of love," yet it does the rest.

In Debra and Sharon's accounts, they come to know mystery through the surprise of improvisation. According to Phil, this is fairly common among InterPlayers. He explained, "[The] whole thing of the surprise of what happens [in InterPlay]—a lot of people really experience that as spiritual. They would put that in that category—mysterious, wonder, awe, surprise. I think those are all kind of basic spiritual

experiences" (Porter 2005). Phil confirms what Debra and others have said, that as a performer you have "a sense of plugging into something that feels like it's bigger than you, especially when you're working with other people" (Porter 2005). Even though the group is not talking, there is communication that happens, which people experience as mystery. Unlike other spiritual practices, in improvisation said Phil: "You get really direct access to that [mystery]. Again it's very reliable in my experience and pretty consistent that you'll get the surprise of creation, which I think is the wonderful thing about being an artist—that surprise…Improvisation teaches you can start down the road that you don't know where it's gonna end and you'll be okay. You just kind of keep following the path" (Porter 2005). When Phil referred to having "direct access" to mystery, he means experiencing it through physicality. The surprise of creation is bodily experience that people can seek through practice. While the experience of surprise can be transformative for the performer, it can also be for the audience, which is consistent with my discussion of Moore's notion of "expecting the unexpected" (2004).

Recall that Moore (2004) argues the Bible is full of stories where a reversal happens or there is an unexpected turn of events. For example, in Matthew 22:15-22, the Pharisees ask Jesus a question to trap him into either rejecting taxes, which would amount to treason, or supporting taxes, which would alienate the people burdened by taxes. By answering, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's," Jesus takes the Pharisees by surprise. Moore writes, "The unexpected came from Jesus' teaching that the predictable world of two choices—either/or—was not so predictable after all. Such is the nature of surprise, and such is its power: to stop people from their superficial assumptions (e.g., about

blindness), their common understandings (e.g, of healing), their efforts to damage others (e.g., the Pharisees' effort to trap Jesus), and their limited patterns of thought (e.g., either/or thinking)" (Moore 2004, 43-44).

Demonstrating the power of mystery to surprise, Masankho recounted his experience of bringing InterPlay to San Francisco Juvenile Center, Cellblock H, where the worst offenders are detained. He told the story as if I were more than an audience of one, acting out multiple roles. He said:

> I went in and I said, "My name is Masankho Banda and I'm here to come and sing and dance with you."
>
> "Why?" like looking at me like, "If you don't give me a good answer, I'm going to take your head off. I don't have a gun, so I can't cap you but I'll take your head off."
>
> And I said, "Because I care about you and I love you."
>
> "You don't care jack. You don't even know me."
>
> I said, "Yes, I don't know you but I don't have to know you. All I know is that right now you and I are standing in this place." I said, "What's your name?" He told me. He was a[n Asian] young man…I said, "Where do you live?"
>
> He told me an address somewhere in the Mission [District]. And I started to sing just based on his name and his address and what I could see of his appearance. He went from leaning back, disinterested, to sitting up and looking at me. (Masankho 2008)

Masankho went on to describe how he created eight songs for eight different young men. And as a result, they said to him, "Nobody has even said to us that they love us. Nobody has taken the time." And they said "How did you know all of that about me?" Masankho interpreted the significance of the story, saying

> I know that in that moment God was there. In that moment there was a sense in my core being and knowing that I was reaching these kids on a level that at which no lecture [or] book would be able to.

> No, I don't know the kids…It was only a one-time session. I didn't go back to them. Who knows? Maybe they left there and as soon as they were out went and car jacked another car?...But I would like to think that of the…eight or twelve kids that were in there that one of them went back to his cell and said, "What was that about? What was that about?" (Masankho 2008)

Later Masankho explained to me how he was able to reach these young men, spontaneously singing what they needed to hear. He believes that because humans share space—in his words that "my spirit energy and your spirit energy share the same magnetic field"—people can infer things about one another that are revealed in the moment. Masankho (2008) said, "I had to really key in and listen to the energy exchange that was going on with these young men as I sang to them. And improvisation allows that even more than if they had filled out a questionnaire for me to sing from." If he had prior knowledge of these young men, said Masankho, he would have formed mental categories that would have diminished the power of the song. He concluded, "[I]mprovisation allows the person doing the improvising to drop into that which is not previously known but is only understood at a cellular, molecular, spirit level" (Masankho 2008).

Not only was he surprised by the experience, Masankho took these young men by surprise, a moment where the Unexpected Holy broke through. The surprise of play was powerful enough to touch the young men in Cellblock H, who one might assume were beyond reach. The play form that Masankho implicitly presented them was "What can we make together?" which was not only unexpected and bold, but seemingly impossible given his lack of prior knowledge of them. The unlikeliness of this play form made it all the more alluring and engaging. One by one, the young men agreed to play with Masankho. Imagining that one of them may have gone back to his cell and asked, "What

was that about?" Masankho referred to the kind of reversal about which Moore writes (2004). His account is similar to Debra's, where the surprise button gave coherence to a performance, and to Sharon's, where she discussed the unexpected blessings of improvisation, including fun, laughter, and love. In all three stories, no one could fully explain how transformation happens, only that God was involved.

Since I have never associated love with improvisation, I find it striking that both Masankho and Sharon risk themselves for the sake of love. Recall how Masankho told the young men that he was there because he loved them. Taking InterPlay into a dangerous world, he risked himself for the sake of these young men, just as Jesus was taking a risk in not giving the Pharisees an answer they expected. Sharon's clarity about why she risks looking like a fool for the sake of love shed light on how mystery works through artistic play. Not only is she transformed by love through the performance, it transforms all those participating, including the audience. Its effects are magnified and multiplied, though it would not have been possible if she had not made a personal decision to surrender to the inner impulse of love. The same could be said of Masankho.

In all the stories above, InterPlayers moved beyond Kaufman in articulating <u>how</u> a person participates in serendipitous creativity. They talked about "tuning in" with other performers to create something greater than themselves or listening to the "inner impulse of love" that leads to unexpected blessing. Masankho discussed how he tuned into the energy of these young men, using his senses and intuition to glean truths with which he created his songs. In addition, there is the common theme of trust in these accounts. Masankho did not administer a questionnaire in advance to glean information about the young men of Cellblock H, rather he trusted he could access resources with which to

improvise in the moment. The same could be said of Sharon, when she practices listening to the voice of mystery that says, "Just do this and I'll take care of the rest."

While Kaufman discusses serendipitous creativity as an intellectual notion, the God-images that InterPlay accounts suggest are often kinesthetic—the body experiencing and knowing divine mystery by being creative. According to Marcia McFee, people are not often asked how God feels, yet this is precisely what InterPlayers are expressing when they talk about God, the ultimate, divine mystery, or other terms. In her work, McFee draws on the work of James Gustafson, who discusses how images of God give humans agency. It is not only the case that God images give people a sense of God, but that these images give people a sense of themselves. While Gustafson gives visual and verbal examples, McFee argues that God images are also kinesthetic (2005, 71). She writes, "[T]here is an intense recognition in the ritual moment of the "feel" of the holy as emotional patterns become consciously experienced" (McFee 2005, 73). In a visceral moment of resonance, "[w]e are 'moved' or 'touched' as we experience in our bodies the same kinesthetic experience, with its attending emotional patterns, that our brains have catalogued as an experience of God" (McFee 2005, 73). I turn now to two more accounts of God images that illustrate McFee's point.

When I asked her to describe a powerful moment in InterPlay, Michele told me, "I'm always moved to see the divinity in the let go,…in the allowing." She went on to describe an experience of Walk, Stop, Run at a Wing-It! rehearsal when she began to speak in tongues, something that she had never done before. She said, "[I] had freedom and it was this wave of energy, just love in the room. We were all vocalizing and moving. And it just brings me to that place of peace, just a place of grace" (Michelle

2008). For Michelle, feeling moved is an image of what God feels like. She said, "I know that God is present when the tears begin to flow from me because I tend to be a very sensitive body being. So, all the moments are powerful when I'm in my heart and I'm in my truth and I'm in the freedom to just allow God to have her way to just express to me" (Michelle 2008). In this last sentence, she explained her experience of divine mystery in the "let go" or "the allowing," which resonates with Sharon's account of the spiritual value of letting go. In Michelle's case, perhaps part of the visceral experience of letting go is letting the tears release, which allows her to sense God's presence.

Another beautiful kinesthetic image of God was told to me by Coke, who spoke earlier on God as creativity. This time, she described the InterPlay floor as God.

> [T]he [InterPlay] floor calls and receives…I feel called to it—to meet it exactly as I am, to meet it completely in integrity of where I am at that moment and at the same time in community somehow, to be thoroughly embodied no matter what that is…[Sometimes it's] the call to find what that is for me on a given day, to have the time to make that journey, to being led by my body. And giving my life in that moment through my body whatever it needs… I feel so, so beckoned, so invited, welcomed, challenged even by the floor to be honest.
>
> …[W]hatever it is that I bring, it [the InterPlay floor] not only receives but it transforms. It takes me to the next place. I leave the floor most of the time with more of myself, and just feeling a plumb line and feeling nothing but gratitude. Feeling for the first time in my life very happy to be me and feeling a sense of what I'm here to do. Those are the clarities I've gotten on the floor.

In Coke's account, the theme of surrender emerges as it has in others. However, in Coke's image of the InterPlay floor as God, she expresses not a sense of giving into or allowing divine mystery to unfold, as in Sharon's case, but a feeling of being received by the floor. I have heard other dancers talk about "releasing into the floor" or feeling the floor "support" the body, but Coke is constructing theological meaning from her physical experience of the floor. She discusses meeting the floor as she is, much like Michelle

experiences the divine when she allows herself to be "in her truth." In Coke's case, her experience challenges the traditional God images of her Christian upbringing. She told me:

> There's this transcendent out there God, and then there's this other God that is completely the InterPlay dance floor. And that God holds whatever I bring and doesn't push me or judge me or. It just says, "Bring it." It circles me back to certain things that never made sense theologically…I can maybe sit in a church now, you know, because I have left the church.
>
> [Thinking about God as the InterPlay floor has] really flipped and turned and danced with me theologically—like it is the God that I maybe deep down had always really needed or hoped God to be, but didn't dare say. I really need a God who will tell me to have yourself, and [who will say to me] that the more deeply whole you become the more holy you become.

Coke has experienced an image of God that feels true in her body, knowledge that she did not learn in church and in fact disturbs what she learned in church. She has gained spiritual knowledge through performance—by doing and being, which is not unlike how Garden Angels come to know divine mystery through the pruning.

Though Kaufman does not discuss them, the connections between surprise, surrender, and serendipitous creativity are remarkably deep. To participate in God as serendipitous creativity, InterPlayers make choices that involve risk, courage, and attunement—all for the sake of something unimaginably bigger and better. According to these accounts, transformation occurs not only in moments of surprise but also surrender, and it occurs not only for the performers but often for the audience as well. Unexpected abundance or grace emerges for all. InterPlayers reveal moments when God seems outside of them, capable of sneaking up and surprising them as it were. Sometimes they seem painfully aware of their separation from God, for example when they struggle to surrender to the "impulse of love" or to their own truth. Yet in these accounts,

InterPlayers also describe moments of participating in divine mystery itself—when the process of creating is so surprisingly coherent, full of grace, and transformative that it can be nothing but God. Moments of surrender are not anguished but filled with ease, when the waiting floor welcomes the dancer as she is. These accounts reveal how this form of artistic play exposes both the transcendent and immanent aspects of the God of the Unexpected—times when people seek God (as if God were outside) and those when people participate in God (as if in union with God).

Notice the active role of InterPlayers in their encounters with the God of the Unexpected. These were not stories of people waiting passively for God, rather they chose to seek or participate in divine mystery through artistic play, and in some cases they chose to be agents of the Unexpected for the sake of transforming others. The seeking in which InterPlayers engage is not the familiar, direct, worldly seeking. They practice an indirect seeking, shaped by allowing openness, trust, and inner listening not only to the promptings of Spirit but to themselves, including the body. Perhaps this is a familiar spiritual posture among some Christians, for example from the Charismatic tradition, where people attune and surrender themselves to the Holy Spirit, manifesting itself in the speaking of tongues or in miraculous healings. More radical for Christian theology is the notion of participating in divine mystery by practicing creativity, flexibility, resourcefulness, or willingness to go with and contribute to what is emerging in the moment of the artistic process. This form of artistic play suggests some human responsibility for or at least participation in divine revelation.

In all these accounts, people are playing with kinesthetic images of God that are rarely discussed or taught in church. Those cited here have described the feel of God in

the mystery of color, in the unexpected coherence of a performance, in the tuning into creative intuitions or impulses, in the let go or allowing of God, and in the InterPlay floor itself. Here play with God images is through the performing body, while at SJUMC it is through visual images, though both evoke the sensing body. In both cases, the transitional phenomena in which people engage allow them play with God images. Because InterPlay is not positioned within institutional religion, InterPlayers are perhaps freer than members of SJUMC to play creatively with God images. Yet even here, some who have left the church, like Coke, still struggle to be completely free from the objective God images inherited from tradition that Ulanov discusses (2001).

In the last section, I explored the self created in InterPlay. As I argued, such a self is willing to take risks, to play with the boundaries of the conventional, to create in the moment, to explore physicality, to be seen and known by the community, to receive affirmation of one's honest expressions of self, to affirm others through mirroring, and to know the self through the body. In exploring what people come to know about divine mystery through InterPlay, I have sought to reveal the close relationship between the God images that the practice generates and the self created, performed and experienced, which resonates with McFee's retrieval of Gustafson. However, it is not only the case that images of God give human beings agency, as Gustafson suggests, but that aesthetics shape subjective God images. In the next chapter, I discuss my notion of local practical theological aesthetics.

Teaching and the Unexpected

While previous sections of this chapter explored how the play frame and

performance in InterPlay allow participants to create a self and gain spiritual knowledge, now I approach spiritual formation from the standpoint of pedagogy. Because spiritual formation in InterPlay has much to do with teaching for openness to the Unexpected, in this section I discuss how this happens through the structure, language, and mentoring of InterPlay. Sometimes religious educators discuss teaching with openness to the unexpected, referring to the teacher's ability to improvise and adapt to the emerging teaching moment, but here the focus is on teaching for the learners' openness to the Unexpected Holy.

Structure

A fascinating phenomenon happens at every InterPlay session, which Phil calls a "shift of agreements" (Porter 2005). He said that the first agreement is to get out of one's chair. As he points out, considering how much people interact verbally with one another, agreeing to move is a significant shift. The second agreement is to do what may seem purposeless at first, which is also countercultural. For example, in traditional education, a teacher usually explains the purpose of an exercise or reading when it is assigned. Given how busy life is, most people would not agree to do anything without being able to assess its purpose. The third agreement is to risk, which includes creating art without having planned or thought of it before and possibly looking foolish or feeling embarrassed (Phil notes that "we try to control that as much as possible because we don't want that experience either" [Porter 2005]) Certainly, agreeing to the possibility of looking foolish is a major shift from the common tendency to protect one's self-image, especially in public. The fourth agreement is to be more open or direct with one another.

According to Phil, it is not in the culture to be direct, but that it happens so easily in InterPlay comes as a surprise to people. The final agreement, which is related to the prior one, is to share information in a semi-public fashion, which is also bold. According to Phil, "[the] InterPlay container creates a place where people can be out about their information and in a place that isn't necessarily wide open but it is also not necessarily a place of confidentiality" (Porter 2005). They never promise confidentiality as is common in other settings, like psychotherapy. All these agreements shift participants toward greater openness to the unknown and to the unexpected, each one leading to the unconventional, taking participants to a fresh edge. The shift of agreements moves people out of or to the borders of their comfort zone.

In terms of play theory, these agreements are analogous to rules, which allow play to take place (Johnston 1997, Berryman 1991). According Johan Huizinga, rules "determine what 'holds' in the temporary world circumscribed by play" (1950, 11). Interestingly, these agreements are not discussed at the beginning of an InterPlay session, like "ground rules" are sometimes established in group contexts. Instead participants agree to the "rules" in the process of the practice. I discussed how the language (e.g., the InterPlay name) and structure of InterPlay create the play frame, which moves participants from the everyday world of traditional norms and assumptions to the world of play. However, in establishing "This is play," the play frame does not specify how play will take shape, how it will be maintained, and what it requires from players, while the agreements that Phil outlines do all of these.

The shift of agreements begins from the moment InterPlay starts. For example, the InterPlay Warm Up, which begins nearly all InterPlay sessions, introduces

participants to three of the agreements. First, it is an exercise that gets people up and moving. Second, the purpose of some parts might seem clear, like stretching, which is a traditional way of warming up the body, but for a newcomer the intent of other parts might not seem obvious, like fake tap dancing. The new person is invited to trust the process without necessarily knowing the rationale. Third, the Warm Up invites participants to risk doing things they do not do in adult life, like pretending to throw paint around the room ("thrusting"), even at the risk of feeling foolish. Other basic forms like Babbling involve the fourth and fifth agreements about being direct and sharing information in a semi-public fashion. Recall the earlier discussion about how quickly people learn about each other and build bonds between one another through this simple form.

Joan (age 77), who has been practicing InterPlay for twelve years, attested to the reliability and necessity of the agreements. She described her experience of doing Walk, Stop, Run with 300 people at the first international InterPlay conference in Nashville in 2004. Joan (2005) said, "[A]ll [these people were] just smiling and looking at one another and jumping up and down and running and sitting at the side. That's a lot of energy. It's a lot of trust…[to] have someone come up behind you that you don't even know who it is and just by the way they touched you, you know they knew what they were doing and you could lean back on them."

What was key for Joan's ability to trust was realizing that other participants "knew what they were doing," meaning they shared the same agreements to the same degree, which she gauged through touch. By feeling the touch of others, she knew it was safe enough to risk leaning back on them, even before she saw their face. With delight

she said, "I can lean into them when they lean back…If they lean in, I lean in and that's right. Then you start playing and squirming…They may have seen me but I haven't seen them. It's a surprise" (Joan 2005). Without fellow InterPlayers participating in the shift of agreements, Joan would have never experienced the playful surprise of leaning back on a stranger and finding that they were leaning back. In this moment, play depended on all participants agreeing to mutual risk, not only in sharing weight but in having physical contact not common in everyday life.[8] As Huizinga notes, the play-world is fragile, vulnerable to collapse if players trespass or ignore the rules (1950, 11).

It seems counterintuitive that agreements and the structures in which they are embedded would create opportunities for the Unexpected. Usually rules are made to guard against the unexpected, like the "low blow" in a sparring tournament or grabbing the face mask in football. However, Johnston argues that the spontaneity of play is made possible by its design. He writes, "The player is someone who chooses a set of rules, an order, as a vehicle for the free expression of his or her joy, power and spontaneity" (Johnston 1997, 41).

In writing about rules, play theorists often do not explain how players learn the rules and agree to them, assuming that all players "magically" know and agree to them, but Phil and Cynthia have coined the term *incrementality* to describe a built-in characteristic of their pedagogy, which initiates the shift of agreements little by little and allows people to feel safe enough to do the unusual. Having written the scripts for the InterPlay forms with incrementality in mind, they ensure that every step of a script challenges the participant a little bit more, introducing slightly greater complexity. This

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[8] InterPlay is not the only form of artistic play that hinges on this agreement to risk. People who practice contact improvisation, a form of dance involving weight exchange, leaning, and momentum, would identify easily with Joan's story.

is not the same as what educators call "chunking," giving learners manageable bites of information at one time. In my experience of InterPlay forms, incrementality involves experiential knowledge that builds on itself, moving the learner from the simple to the advanced and/or from the superficial to the profound.

Unlike chunking, incrementality involves a cumulative effect, equipping the learner more and more powerfully with every step.[9] Gretchen, who recently graduated from what was then called the InterPlay Leadership Program, said, "Phil and Cynthia stress over and over and over in year two of the Leadership program—don't make up your own directions. Trust in the increments that are there because if you do them as we wrote them after twenty-five years of experience, they work. So, what do they work at? They work in helping people feel more comfortable and helping people have insights and just in creating more joy." When Gretchen spoke about "directions," she referred to what I have been calling the "script." She later suggested that the built-in incrementality of the forms allows participants to avoid possible knee-jerk resistance if a leader were to tell them in the beginning what they will do by the end. Gretchen (2008) asserted, "Maybe building surprise is really incrementalism—going slowly until people are doing something and they go, 'Oh, I'm doing it.' InterPlayers call this "sneaking up" on a realization or experience. To allow this to emerge, InterPlay leaders must intentionally not frame the intent and anticipated result of an InterPlay form, but instead rely on its incrementality. Again, the notion of not allowing language get in the way of what the forms teach runs against traditional pedagogy, which often involves a verbal preview of what is going to be learned.

[9] Some educators might call this "sequencing."

Cynthia acknowledges that inviting people to perform improvisation is asking them to engage in something highly risky, but their pedagogy aims at making the process "doable," which is the intent of incrementality. She explained, " [I'm] really interested in making it [improvisation] doable because my real purpose on the planet is to foster freedom—to help people experience the freedom of their own expression, the power of community. So, that's gonna require the risk of self. And I think most people want to risk and be successful, so it's not really the question of the risk…[O]ne thing I just keep wishing is that people could not just see the risk, but what they might be able to accomplish" (Winton-Henry 2005).

Cynthia is interested in making a scary process like improvisation doable because the potential rewards (i.e., what people might be able to accomplish) are worth the risk. She is making the case that risk is inherent in the potential transformation that InterPlay involves. Not believing that the world is safe, the co-founder makes no promises about "safe space" in InterPlay, only making it "safe enough." She argues that InterPlay starts from a different assumption from therapy, where the language of "safe space" is common. Not about healing people or making them feel safe, InterPlay asks instead, "What can we make?" She added, "Actually it has to be dangerous enough, that we can make something" (Winton-Henry 2005).

In light of Cynthia's point about the pedagogic value of risk and strategies to manage it, the issue of risk seems strangely absent from Maria Harris' work (1991) on aesthetic teaching, though she addresses issues of power and revelation. I suspect it is because Harris reflects on learning through visual art, which is can provoke controversy or a sense of risk, but is perhaps safer than the performing arts, which exposes the learner

to greater vulnerability through enactment and being seen and heard. Unless religious educators have attempted the performing arts, they may not be sensitive to the risks involved in teaching through them.

Addressing her notion of "safe enough," Cynthia added one more agreement to Phil's list, and either founder could probably add more. She said,

> A primary agreement happens right at the very beginning—you get to take care of yourself. And then we keep following up on that. We don't jump into people's bodies. We don't jump into their space. We try to teach our communities that we don't have to rush to each other but to stand with each other. We do it in very physical ways. We're definitely teaching about respect. Every single aspect of how the process works offer the chance for self-care and respect.
>
> But they're [the agreements] not didactic. They're experienced. People say it over and over again "I felt so safe, I felt so safe." Well, it's from the way that the patterns of practice and behavior occur. And that is backed up by our leadership. (Winton-Henry 2005

As Cynthia alludes, the ethic of taking care of oneself is embedded in every aspect of the InterPlay process, including the structures themselves. For instance, every script gives options with which people can experiment. The constant availability of choices is paramount for fostering freedom. Importantly, this shift of agreement is inculcated in multiple ways, not only in the forms themselves but in the InterPlay leadership. Furthermore, the point of this additional agreement (i.e., you get to take care of yourself) is that it delegates partial responsibility for safety to participants, so that "safe enough" is not established by leaders alone. This suggests that in artistic play (as in other kinds of play), by freely agreeing to play, a person plays at his/her own risk. Comparing play to therapy, it is clear that players have autonomy that, for example, psychiatric patients do not.

I find Phil and Cynthia's notions of a "shift of agreements" and "safe enough" analytically useful for thinking about the pedagogic potential of artistic play. Agreements seem especially appropriate to play, which is not only voluntary but also governed by rules to which all players consent. But unlike rules, the notion of a shift of agreements calls attention to what often goes unarticulated, namely the norms of non-play with which participants start and the process by which they shift toward new agreements of play. For example, Mom's art involves several unsaid agreements including (1) thinking theologically through visual, embodied metaphor, (2) thinking theologically through culture, and (3) going on an imaginative adventure. In this case, the artifacts themselves and the narrative that frames them invite the shift of agreements, which represents a marked departure from the everyday culture of worship at SJUMC. Like other mainline Protestant liturgies, worship at SJUMC tends to be dominated by words and the arts limited to music. And though it is an racial/ethnic minority church, culture is not a primary theological lens on most Sundays. Liturgy is characterized by the routine and the familiar, rather than by imaginative adventure. Comparing the agreements made in InterPlay with those made in Mom's art, I see a remarkable similarity: Both shift people toward openness to the Unexpected, which suggests that agreements made through artistic play do the same.

The other analytically helpful term I borrow is InterPlay's notion of "safe enough." Artistic play needs to have an edginess for it to be transformative. The notion of safe enough raises the question of how to structure learning situations that account for the safety of learners, while giving risk greater pedagogical respect than is common. The question is how to make learning "safe enough" to be doable but dangerous enough to be

meaningful. In Mom's art, the art itself created a safe enough encounter, in that members of the congregation could always choose not to "remember the dismembered" (Moore 2004) as discussed earlier, yet the artifacts remained enticingly disturbing and provocative. Artistic play makes the spiritual stakes felt and known, even making people stretch for them beyond or at the borders of the comfortable. However, it also provides the safe enough hook to engage in the experience, revealing the mysterious, shrouded path to follow that promises greater spiritual knowing.

Language

The "shift of agreements" and "safe enough" are established through the structure of practice (i.e., the InterPlay forms), however these terms are also part of an InterPlay language that fosters openness to the Unexpected. Because articulating the InterPlay philosophy has been important to the founders from the inception of the practice, they have developed a wide lexicon to express key concepts, sometimes to compensate for deficits in the English language. One of my favorite InterPlay terms is *sneaky deep*, which refers to taking an indirect approach to the search for spiritual knowledge. Amy explained, "[H]eading [at] things straight on this isn't always the fastest way or the most comfortable way of trying to [learn]—it can feel like an attack." Instead, she said, "Coming around through back door and coming around on something that feels [like]: 'Oh, I can do that. Oh, wait a minute. Look what I just did.' It's exciting" (Amy 2008). Annie said something similar, comparing InterPlay's "sneaky deep" approach to *aikido*. She said, "[W]hen you hit something head on, it doesn't wanna move…It's like InterPlay is sort of like *aikido* play, [laughing]. Like it kind of uses the energy so that you can get

to your chronic patterns without seeming like [it]--because they're sneaky too. They [chronic patterns] don't like to be hit head on" (Annie 2008). The consistency with which InterPlayers discuss the "sneaky deep" is striking, mirroring or elaborating the way that Phil and Cynthia talk about it. However, Amy and Annie evoke sensory images in describing the "sneaky deep," suggesting that their embodied experience is an important source of their understanding, not simply mimicry of the founder's language.

The beauty of having a term like *sneaky deep* is that it allows people to conceptualize, name, and discuss a visceral experience, allowing people to engage the Unexpected not only cognitively but physically, as the concept itself informs the physical experience of it. The concept is experienced by the "bodymind," as Phil and Cynthia would say. As discussed more fully below, religious educators like Parker Palmer (2004) also affirm an indirect approach to spiritual formation. Using Emily Dickinson's phrase, Palmer discusses soul truth needing to be told "on the slant." The shy soul must be approached indirectly, through a medium including poems, stories, or music (Palmer 2004, 92). However, Palmer's indirect approach is largely verbal and auditory rather than a full embodied experience, which is unique to InterPlay and artistic play in general.

Other InterPlay terms related to "sneaky deep" include the notion of the "evil twin" or the inner "trickster," which is another means of teaching for openness to the Unexpected. This term is contained in the script for Hand to Hand Contact dances, where partners play with the contact of one person's hand to the other's. New participants are often tentative in their contact, moving slow enough to maintain connection at all times. However, at one point the leader says, "If you haven't already, include your evil twin—that part of you that wants to trick your partner" (Porter and Winton-Henry 2003, 32).

This is an explicit, verbal cue that welcomes and gives permission for mischief and surprise, a capacity that InterPlay assumes is inherent. One implication of having the terms *evil twin* and *trickster* (and the experience of playfully letting them out) is that it cultivates an implicit willingness to be tricked. When I asked Sharon (2008) about this, she said:

> It's [the trickster is] an archetypal energy that I think we all know in some form. The arts play on this all the time and there are some sacred traditions that very clearly [depict the trickster like] the sacred Hopi clowns. Everyone knows that…they're gonna come out, they know they're gonna interrupt. And so that thing of being interrupted by the unexpected is something that seems to always be at the heart of my interactive improvisational work. And when I first studied the Hopi clowns it was like, "Oh, my God that's it, I'm a Hopi clown," in terms of that sneaking or trickster.

In her performances, Sharon creates sacred moments as she surprises others. She is aware of the spiritual value of being tricked or taken by surprise, which relates to Amy and Annie's accounts of the "sneaky deep." Arguing that the willingness to be tricked is basic to humanity, she said, it begins as children—in the delight of Peek-a-Boo. Sharon described a street performer on San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf who has made a living for years by hiding behind bushes and shouting "Boo" at passing tourists. He is famous for it. Encoded within human beings is longing for the possibility for the in-breaking of truth that accompanies being taken by surprise, despite a reluctance to be disoriented. Sharon (2008) said, "Whether we're willing to [be tricked] or not, the joke's on me. I often think that it's all a holy joke and that there's this upside-down truth from the way we live our lives. And so the interruption is to cut through it and to turn us on our heads."

The term *trickster* allows Sharon to name what she practices and identify what other religious traditions have also recognized. While she discusses the Hopi clowns,

there are also the holy fools in Eastern Christian tradition, at their height in the sixteenth century. The "holy joke" and the "upside-down truth" that Sharon refers to would be much appreciated by these holy fools, who emphasized "unlearning delusions of Godless maturity"; being saved by God's weakness, poverty, humiliation and foolishness; and identifying with those excluded from centers of power (Saward 1980, 61-63). As I discussed in the Introduction, holy Fools like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis of Assisi were among many "tricksters" of their age, some of whom even feigned madness to participate in a radical departure from worldly knowing. The word *trickster* itself is a playful reversal of the image of tricksters as dishonest, conniving, threatening people to those taking a sacred, mysterious role of triggering divine wisdom in arresting ways.

Other InterPlay terms that assist in teaching for openness to the Unexpected include "easy focus" and "holding things lightly." Cynthia writes, "Easy focus is the experience of the physical state of openness throughout our whole being" (Winton-Henry 2004, 47). People (especially those of us in academia) often experience "being in our heads," giving something a good, hard look and concentrating on the details, which Phil and Cynthia call being in our "focuser" and using a "hard focus." They admonish people to "think with their whole being" by practicing an "easy focus." Cynthia writes how to practice this: "Give your face a rub. Close your eyes. Massage the place between your eyes. Take a deep breath. When you relax, softly open your eyes with an easy focus. Take in the whole scene. Enjoy being fed by the whole of what you see, rather than by analyzing and looking at one thing and the next" (Winton-Henry 2004, 48).

Though Cynthia does not mention surprise or the Unexpected, the language of easy focus implicitly teaches openness to it by encouraging people to take in information

in unaccustomed ways. Hard focus precludes surprise since it is in the mode of specifying and categorizing, but easy focus resists such thinking, making room not only for unexpected thoughts but also feelings and sensations. A term related to "easy focus" is "holding things lightly," which means not approaching an issue in a direct, heavy handed way, but not letting it go completely. Instead "holding things lightly" requires gentle attention. Mimicking himself leading InterPlay, Phil (2008) said, "Okay, we're gonna do a dance and it's about holding lightly some place in your life where you want more energy." The task is not to think hard about an area of need but to "dance" with it. Like easy focus, holding things lightly is an expression that teaches openness to what is unknown, including what I may not know until I play with it though the practice.

Taking the notion of artifacts from the other case study, there are ways in which the InterPlay terms are like artifacts, not in materiality but in otherness. InterPlay terms like *evil twin* and *sneaky deep* are "other" in that they are familiar words in unfamiliar combinations, bestowing new meaning that resists being taken for granted or becoming ordinary. In addition, InterPlay terms are like the *Pottery of Tears*, the ghostly martyrs, and the trees in the Issei garden in that they are gateways to other experience—whether imagined in memory (SJUMC) or enacted in performance (InterPlay). While Mom's art and the garden are artifacts from the material culture of SJUMC, the terms examined here are from the verbal culture of InterPlay. All participate in creating the life-world of their respective contexts. Arguing that through ritual people create a life-world, Tom Driver writes, "[R]itual is a synecdoche granting its participants the glimpse, touch, and taste of an imagined universe" (1991, 136). No doubt he would agree that a world is brought to life through the language and artifacts of ritual. To be clear, I am not conflating language

and artifacts in general because most ordinary language cannot be considered an artifact (or even like an artifact). However, InterPlay terms are unique creations of the artistic process that is InterPlay, which makes them like artifacts. No two InterPlayers have exactly the same notion of the "trickster," yet it belongs to each person. Most do not practice InterPlay forms outside of an InterPlay context, but many bring InterPlay terms into their everyday lives, much like people bring artifacts from far away worlds into their homes.[10] Such artifacts allow a tiny piece of that other world to exist in everyday life.

This analysis of InterPlay language leads to an important question about artistic play: What is being played with here? In the case of SJUMC, images and artifacts are the objects of play. In InterPlay, participants are playing with the "stuff of their lives," but they are also playing with language as a way of playing with the meaning and substance of their lives. For example, the terms *easy focus* or *trickster* play with habituated notions and ways of thinking, feeling, and doing. They not only name, redefine, and explain openness to the Unexpected on a cognitive level, they are also micropractices for the bodymind to engage. For example, easy focus is not merely a concept but something to do and make a habit of.

Mentoring

With participants well versed in the forms and language of the practice, InterPlay leaders can engage in mentoring them, a process that also involves openness to the Unexpected. In Mary Elizabeth Moore's characterization (2004), mentoring has an

[10] For example, in describing her life as a school teacher, Gretchen (2008) says, "I am teaching world history. I don't know anything about world history. I'm learning it as I go. I don't have a lot of time or desire to do significant lesson planning. I am perhaps overly confident in my ability to improvise. And I hold that pretty lightly with an easy focus." The terms *holding lightly* and *easy focus* pop up in her everyday discourse, connecting her life with the world of InterPlay.

open-ended quality. As one might expect, mentoring involves listening to questions of others, guiding their discernment, and "walking with" them by investing time and interest in them, seeking ways to enhance their life, and responding to their needs (Moore 2004, 182). However, Moore also adds that mentors let go of control and allow others to seize opportunities and assume responsibilities (2004, 182-5), which suggests that mentoring respects the integrity of those seeking guidance, trusting their inner knowing and learning. This kind of mentoring relationship allows room for the Unexpected.

Focus sessions may be understood as a form of mentoring that happens in what was then called the InterPlay Leadership Program, where Phil and Cynthia have long term relationships with participants. A focus session allows a person to "receive focus" from InterPlay participants and facilitators, in this case Phil and Cynthia.[11] It is the one InterPlay form where a single person is given direct, individualized attention as he/she plays with an issue of choice. In the beginning, the person is invited to talk about the issue, then Phil and Cynthia suggest an InterPlay form to explore that issue. For instance, in my focus session I chose to address repressed anger, and they asked me to play with the issue through solo movement. After the person performs the improvisation, Phil and Cynthia comment and often suggest a second form. After the second performance, the person is asked to reflect on the experience and receives concluding comments from Phil and Cynthia. While the founders give most of the feedback to the person receiving, the group also participates in giving affirmation and sharing what they noticed.

This type of mentoring may be compared to Parker Palmer's model of "circles of trust," a community that "knows how to welcome the soul and help it hear its voice"

[11] InterPlay's understanding of a focus session contrasts starkly with the way it is understood in the business world, where focus groups are used for testing a product or idea.

(2004, 22). In this form of community, writes Palmer, "We listen to another person's problems, we do not leap or fix or save: we hold the tension to give that person space to hear his or her inner teacher…We create a form of community that is mediated by 'third things.' These poems and stories and works of art allow us to hold challenging issues metaphorically, where they cannot devolve into the pro-or-con choices forced on us by conventional debate" (Palmer 2004, 182). In a focus session, the InterPlay community is functioning as a type of "circle of trust" in that the session is designed not to dictate answers but allow insight to emerge.[12] In Palmer's context, a person meditates on a poem, story, or work of art as a "third thing," which represents neither the voice of the facilitator nor the voice of the participant. Palmer says, "They [third things] have voices of their own, voices that tell the truth about a topic but, in the manner of metaphors, tell it on the slant" (2004, 93).[13] In InterPlay, the art created by the performing self becomes the "third thing," as the person explores the freedom of becoming anyone or any thing, thanks to the play frame. In the process, the performing self becomes an object to itself. The goal in both settings is gathering insight about the self through an encounter with art.

In a program called "Deepening Play and Focus Sessions," Steven asked the group for help on fear of his father's death. Phil invited him to do some storytelling about his father, staying concrete as possible. In response, Steven performed a "DT3," which alternates between three periods of dancing ("D") and talking ("T"). After the improvisation, Cynthia suggested that he and Phil do a contact duet, a form in which they create a performance through movement and contact. As soon as they started dancing, I

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[12] See Palmer's discussion of a clearness committee, in which the community helps an individual through a process of discernment.

[13] Though Palmer does not mention using third things in a clearness committee, the notion of the community being present to an individual's needs and supporting his/her process are similar what happens in an InterPlay focus session.

immediately sensed the poignancy of the moment, my own body registering pain and sadness. I looked around to see if others were feeling the same, and indeed a woman next to me was weeping. With much stillness and tender holding in the duet, it appeared to me that Steven was receiving comfort from Phil. The second piece of music led into movement and moments of intense eye contact between the men. Yet at other times, there was playful movement between them (Field notes, 21 June 2006).

Steven told me that he took from this focus session a new sense of brotherhood that includes his father. He hoped to convey that insight to his father and brothers in some way, hoping that it would comfort his father, who was not only facing his own illness and mortality but grieving about the loss of his brothers and friends. Evidently, Steven brought this same issue (i.e., fear of his father's death) to other InterPlay focus sessions, but something pivotal happened at this one. When I ask why, he said that what emerged this day had been part of a long process, but made more urgent by his impending visit with his father, who was to have a biopsy. Previous focus sessions had been with all women, which was not the energy that he needed. Telling stories in the form of a DT3 as he did in this session brought up unexpected memories of his childhood, like banging his head against his crib, an image that suggested to him that he had been banging his head long enough. He described how his body resonated with having contact with Phil in the second part of the session and how surprised he was by the power of it. He was surprised when Phil initiated play in the midst of grief, which was helpful as Steven's energy was "bogging down" as he put it. In the unexpected movement from grief to play to grief, play opened up the heart to grief, breaking things open. It was a good learning for him, he told me. Phil allowed him to call him "Dad"

and to end it when he was ready. Though he felt some resistance at first, he explained it was relatively easy to allow Phil to be his father. The form was exactly what he needed, allowing him to experience his dad supporting him (Field notes, 22 June 2006).

According to Cynthia, what distinguishes an excellent focus session from a satisfactory one is whether or not the person has experienced a shift in the issue he or she has chosen. In contrast to an excellent focus session, where change is strongly felt, a satisfactory session happens when change is "less clear in the body, the emotions, and a person's energy," she explains (Field notes, 18 June 2006). Sometimes it takes one or two sessions before something happens, as was the case for Steven. While Palmer (2004) does not discuss the role of the body in hearing the voice of what he calls the "inner teacher," the body plays a key role in truth telling in InterPlay. According to Phil, focus sessions are a way to get direct information about what InterPlay calls "bodywisdom" (Field notes, 21 June 2006). In either case, mentoring is based on an open-ended, indirect approach that allows for the Unexpected, as seen in Steven's case.

In Steven's focus session Phil and Cynthia modeled gifted mentoring: choosing the right forms, making insightful comments, and even (Phil) playing a supporting role in the performance. His job was to be present but as neutral as possible, he said, in order to be whatever Steven needed him to be. Later Phil told me that it took very little of him personally to take that role. He took cues from Steven's body about what he needed, and Phil listened to his own body to know what was appropriate. For example, he initiated movement when he sensed that "moving emotions" might be helpful (Field notes, 21 June 2006) (probably at the point when Steven was beginning to feel bogged down by grief.) This was effective mentoring on Phil's part in listening to and "walking with"

Steven (as Moore puts it [2004, 182]), but also in guiding his process of discernment, as Steven explored his feelings through movement. At the same time, Phil's participation added to the otherness of the "third thing" being created in the performance, by acting on behalf of the Unexpected and surprising Steven. In a focus session, the founders help to create a safe enough/risky enough experience that will benefit those they mentor. The structure (i.e., the forms) and language of InterPlay are vital but not alone in creating and supporting opportunities for the Unexpected. It is also InterPlay leadership and the community itself, as I discuss shortly.

Through performance analysis, I have sought to show how InterPlay allows a person to create a self as well as God-images, however InterPlay also creates a community—a "mentoring community" (Parks 2000). Palmer offers one vision of a mentoring community in his description of circles of trust, whose function is to "create space" for the soul to reveal its truth. However, according to Palmer, the soul is like a wild animal—tough and resilient but shy. He writes, "A circle of trust is a group of people who know how to sit quietly 'in the woods' with each other and wait for the shy soul to show up" (Palmer 2004, 59). Palmer describes the role of the community in terms of "protecting," "bordering," and "saluting" each other's solitude, "trusting that they [people who have a problem] have within themselves whatever resources they need and that our attentiveness can help bring those resources into play" (2004, 64). Judging by the strict behavioral rules that he sets for circles of trust, Palmer might critique Phil's role in Steven's focus session as invasive, drawing too much attention to himself and imposing an agenda. However, Phil was clear about playing a neutral but supportive role in the duet with Steven, allowing Steven to determine the agenda. Only a highly skilled

and sensitive mentor like Phil could have participated in a contact duet with Steven without competing with or displacing him. As witnesses to Steven's focus session, the rest of the InterPlay community play a role more like what Palmer describes by "holding the space" and protecting the borders.

Even as he performed, Steven was aware of being seen in his focus session. He later described realizing how moving his performance was for others, which is important to him because he receives a sense of joy from realizing what he does as an artist affects others. As an improvisational performer (also outside of InterPlay), he has had to let go of the fear that others will judge him for wanting to be seen. He told me that focus sessions afford him the power to be seen and to receive affirmation, which he finds valuable and helpful (Field notes, 22 June 2006). Earlier I discussed the role of the InterPlay community in mirroring, and here it is again, this time as a function of the mentoring community. The pain that we all felt in watching Steven's performance was reflected back to him in our tears and silent expressions of empathy. An important part of mentoring is providing mentees recognition of or meeting the need to be seen, according to Sharon Parks. Though her work is with young people, she recognizes that the need to be "seen" is important across the life span (2000, 129).

In Parks's work, a mentoring community or mentoring environment is a "context in which a new, more adequate imagination of life and work can be composed, anchored in a sense of *we*" (2000, 134). Mentoring communities extend hospitality to "big questions," which Parks says are "meaning-full questions, ones that ultimately matter" (2000, 137). While she is concerned with the big questions that young adults ask, people continue to pose questions that matter as they continue to mature and need places where

they can ask them. At a focus session, InterPlayers are a mentoring community that provides what Parks calls a "network of belonging" that affirms people but creatively holds their conflict, which fosters faithful imagination. For this notion, Parks draws on James Loder's work on imagination, who discusses how conscious conflict must be held in a "context of rapport." Building on Loder, Parks argues that a community functions to include, sustain, and even encourage constructive conflict, serving as a holding environment that "honor[s] the inner momentum that arises from conscious conflict and drives toward resolution" (2000, 112-113). This notion of a "holding environment" resonates well with InterPlay founders' understanding of the practice as a big enough "container" to hold whatever life stuff that people bring.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored artistic play cultivated as a spiritual practice, which is markedly different from Mom's art and the Issei Garden. Mom's art engages the congregation in artistic play as teaching moments, not as a frequent, regular practice, while the Garden Angels engage in artistic play regularly, but not consciously as a spiritual practice. In contrast, the study of InterPlay shows how artistic play shapes spirituality when it is pursued intentionally, a perspective that reveals more about artistic play.

The case of InterPlay suggests that when artistic play is pursued intentionally as a spiritual practice, it can create a life-world. In the life-world that InterPlay generates, participants envision and enact what they imagine of themselves and the world. This life-world is remarkably comprehensive, including self, community, leadership, place,

language, and structure. All of these elements support one another, having come into existence because one another. Through the practice, participants construct a world in contrast to the everyday work world where most make their living. In the InterPlay world, adults can play (being as loud, silly, or as "big" as they can be), bodies are sources of trusted wisdom, and all artistic creations are celebrated, including those that others would not consider art. People play with the unconventional, trust what they can create in the moment, take risks with those they hardly know, and are seen and affirmed in whatever state they may be. Though InterPlay was born in the San Francisco Bay area, where the arts, spirituality and diverse cultures thrive, this life-world is portable, being created in new iterations all over the United States and other parts of the world. The practice was developed out of the experience of two talented people with a vision, yet the practice has spawned leaders from all over, who are mentoring and training many more.

Part of the InterPlay life-world are the God-images that people create through the practice. As discussed above, these images are closely related to the substance of the practice, which is the creative process of improvisation. Not surprisingly many InterPlayers describe God (or other terms for divine mystery) in terms of creativity. But God images in InterPlay are also related to the aesthetic of the practice, which involves the expressiveness and sensitivity of the performing body. The qualities cultivated by improvisation (i.e., kinesthetic sense, trust, attunement, willingness to surrender, and openness to being surprised) are the very terms that InterPlayers use to describe experiencing God through the practice, providing insight into how they actively choose to participate in serendipitous creativity. True to the aesthetic of the practice, the God-images they describe (i.e., the feel of God in the mystery of color, in the unexpected

coherence of a performance, in the tuning into creative intuitions or impulses, in the let go or allowing of God, and in the InterPlay floor) are creative, organic, and embodied.

While the God-images that InterPlayers describe are unique to the practice, the God of the Unexpected is revealed in all forms of artistic play to the extent to which serendipitous creativity is involved. The transformative power of Mom's art is not solely due to her artistic creativity, but rather something more has been created in combination with others. In the case of *Floating Saints*, there are the ghostly martyrs whose story comes to life, the *yukata* lent by members of the congregation, the architecture of the sanctuary, the preacher's sermon about the twenty-six martyrs, and the memories of those who witness the installation. All interact in ways no one could have predicted. Similarly, evidence of serendipitous creativity can be found in the revitalization of the Issei Garden, once a forlorn, overgrown patch now a pristine, manicured piece of art. It began with one or two people heeding the ghostly voices of the garden and has developed into a community of people dedicated to its care, practicing an artful way of being.

The life-world that is InterPlay exists within a play frame that allows participants to enter more deeply in the practice with the assurance and freedom that "this is play." Rather than functioning as a static border that simply demarcates, the play frame supports and even guides the intention of the participants. In the case of InterPlay, the play frame introduces an intention to approach improvisation with a spirit of adventure and hospitality in the context of community.

In examples from SJUMC, play frames are also present but less explicitly so. Earlier, I mentioned how the border of the Issei Garden serves as a physical reminder of the play frame. The Garden Angels prune the trees and plants with the freedom knowing

“this is play.” However, a play frame exists for Mom’s art as well. The scariness of Christ’s suffering, the Japanese American internment, and the twenty-six martyrs are mitigated by the fluctuation between the real and the not-real created by the play frame of liturgy. As ritual, liturgy is a form of play or theater (Guardini 1998), “the sandbox” as Rev. Barbaree (2008) calls it. This back-and-forth movement between the real/not-real creates spiritual knowing, much like the fluctuation between the me/not-me in transitional phenomena. A given form of artistic play may not produce an entire life-world, as in the case of InterPlay, but it does have a play frame, which separates art from artistic play.

The life-world that is created by InterPlay reveals the pedagogic power of artistic play in two ways. First, the case of InterPlay affirms that the entertainment aspect of artistic play makes it pedagogically effective. This is re-stating an earlier conclusion about Mom’s art, which is that they involve a fun play form. Whether it is the invitation to ask “What is it?” or to play “pretend,” it is a hook to engage people in artistic play. In the case of InterPlay, the task that hooks people in is to “play with the stuff of our lives.” In this form of artistic play, evoking silliness, laughter and fun can be mysteriously compatible with moving human hearts with what is poignant, powerful, and transformative. The fact that artistic play is often fun and entertaining as well as deep makes it all the more attractive and effective as a practice. All of this runs counter to the traditional approach to spiritual formation, which treats it as “serious business.” Instead, artistic play suggests a path of spiritual indirection, which might be more circuitous but infinitely more adventurous, creative, and surprising.

The second implication that I draw from InterPlay about pedagogy and artistic play is that teaching for openness to the Unexpected is feasible. A given form of artistic

play may not have the language and structure that explicitly teaches for openness to the Unexpected, as was the case in Mom's art and the Issei Garden. However, Phil and Cynthia's understanding of a "shift of agreements" and "safe enough/dangerous enough" may prove useful for analyzing other forms of artistic play and constructing learning environments that incorporate artistic play.

Chapter 6
Constructing a Practical Theology of Play through Art

I began with a definition of artistic play as the practice of exploration through art forms in which one opens oneself to unexpected transcendence, delight, or discovery. My assumption was that some forms of artistic play involve a surprise, sensual encounter with divine mystery that challenges habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and doing and allows for the construction of new ways. While there are infinite ways that individuals are held captive by mental, emotional, and spiritual patterns, this project has focused on changing unhealthy patterns of communal captivity. At SJUMC, people have been trapped by internalized racism and colonialism, inherited liturgical aesthetics, memories of internment, silence about historic wounds, cultural forgetting, uneasy biculturalism, and disagreement about what is best for the church. In InterPlay, many people come from being held captive by a disembodied, competitive, individualistic culture that is obsessed with work and economic success. InterPlayers are subject to cultural forces that reinforce splits between mind, body, heart, and spirit, which disempower people and obscure paths to healing (Porter 1997). The degree to which these communities (and the individuals within them) are trapped by cultural, historic, and psychological forces calls for radical, powerful means of transformation and liberation.

Having explored the case studies, it is clearer what is involved in an encounter with the God of the Unexpected in artistic play and why it helps to free people from patterns that keep them captive. A key conclusion is that artistic play offers an opportunity for what I call "mystical adventure," a liberative experience of the

Unexpected. In this chapter, I address how elements found across the case studies—stories, imagination and creativity, and the senses—are involved in making mystical adventure real, compelling, and transformative.

Mystical Adventure

Robert Neale's chapter (1969), "Play as Adventure," is the inspiration for my use of the term *adventure*. The notion of adventure captures well the spirit of play, which involves the assumption of risk, surprise, uncertainty, and promise. According to Neale, adventure happens by chance—suddenly as an occasion for surprise and wonder, so that the player is surprised by the adventure (1969, 42, 48). While Neale assumes that play does not happen without adventure, I would argue that adventure is more like the grace of God, whose presence cannot be dictated yet whose apparent absence does not diminish an experience. In this case, the absence of mystical adventure does not negate the practice of artistic play. The contingency of adventure helps explain why artistic play does not always result in a transformative experience.

Neale's concept of adventure serves as springboard for this project despite some problematic aspects of his work, including his notion that adventure is created by "inner harmony." For Neale, play is an expression of the inner harmony between the need to discharge psychic energy and the need to design experience, which I would identify as aesthetic expressivity. His theory builds on the work of J.C. Friedrich von Schiller, who writes on aesthetic education. However, Neale strips away Schiller's frame of aesthetics and uses a psychological framework instead, which takes Schiller's argument in problematic directions. For example, Neale writes:

> Adventure is the result of the player's inner harmony. In a world of conflict there can be no delight in chance, risk, and striking events. The work of the conflicted self is so crucial that events must be made as normal as possible, the strategy must be carefully planned, and the future must be predictable. Spontaneity, surprise, and novelty upset the careful controls of the work self and produce the response of dread. Curiosity and experimentation are limited by reliance on the results of previous work and by fear at failing at something new. The spirit of adventure is quite different. Harmony of the needs [for the discharge of energy and the design of experience] provides confidence in one's inner and outer environments. Emboldened by trust, the player overcomes the shock of chance, fear of danger, and suspicion of novelty. Moreover, success is not an issue. (Robert Neale, *In Praise of Play: Toward a Psychology of Religion* [New York: Harper & Row, 1969], 43)

Depicting them in the extreme, Neale draws hard lines between the work self and the play self.

By focusing this dichotomy, Neale casts his theory strictly in terms of the mind, but the data gathered for this dissertation does not support Neale's claims. For example, the case of InterPlay blurs the lines between what Neale would call the work self and the play self, suggesting how even the assumptions of the everyday work world (e.g., the need for predictability) can be played with and held lightly. InterPlay also challenges Neale's argument that finding harmony between one's need to discharge energy and to design one's experience leads to surrender to the possibilities and dangers of risk. InterPlay suggests that structure, language and mentoring are effective in teaching for openness to the Unexpected. In other words, while Neale predicates a person's ability to engage in adventure on internal factors, InterPlay argues for the construction of factors external to the participant (e.g., a pedagogy of incrementality, the structure of InterPlay forms, and the skill of leaders). Neale's focus on inner harmony might address individual experiences of play as adventure, but it does not account for how and why individuals experience adventure in community, as in the case of InterPlay.

Neale does not make clear certain distinctions or relationships. First, he argues that play as adventure cannot be a practice. Considering play primarily as a state of mind, he reminds the readers that "the author is making no attempt to exhort the reader to 'go out and play.' An adventure occurs automatically when the need for discharge of energy and design of experience are in harmony. When harmony exists, adventure is the result. Clearly, this harmony is not the result of conscious decision" (Neale 1969, 48). Despite his claim that play is independent of either social or private intention, Neale later argues that religion (and Christianity in particular) is the most mature form of play. Neale writes, "To experience full play which is religious amounts to being called forth into adventure by the sacred" (1969, 121). I struggle to imagine how Neale would explain the relationship between the play of religion and the practices of religion. The confusion continues when he discusses rituals as games, which he considers a mode of adventure. However, rituals are often religious practices. Again, I do not understand the difference Neale sees between ritual as game and ritual as religious practice. Neale would need to explain whether religion is always play or if there are times when religion fails to be play, perhaps falling to the realm of practice.

I am also puzzled by the ambiguity of adventure materializing the moment that inner harmony is achieved, seemingly untouched by anything externally real. Neale argues that adventure is characterized by four elements (peace, freedom, delight and illusion) and two modes (story and game), but he does not show how these are shaped by lived experience. By not addressing play as a practice, Neale makes it difficult to understand his view of play from the perspective of practical theology.

I am using the notion of adventure in the context of artistic play differently from Neale. In this project, mystical adventure is a possible experience within the practice of artistic play, generated not by inner harmony but by multiple factors internal and external, divine and human. Adventure does not appear from nowhere. Rather art is the catalyst and the medium for any adventures it inspires, which are shaped by the location, space, and culture where the art is experienced.

Despite my criticisms of Neale's work, I take inspiration from his term *adventure* because it names and explains much of what the case studies have revealed. In this final chapter, I use the word *adventure* to thread together the case studies and make coherent my understanding of artistic play. The notion of adventure helps account for the role of risk, surprise, and the Unexpected in experiences of artistic play in the case studies, which I discuss in a moment. At the same time, artistic play grounds adventure in a place, in bodies, and in the lived world.

I add the descriptor *mystical* to the term *adventure* to specify an encounter with divine mystery, which is implicit in Neale's understanding of adventure. He writes, "It is possible for adventure to capture totally the life of the mature adult, and this full play is the experience of the holy. The sacred is the realm of new harmony of discharge and design, and religion is the play response to it" (Neale 1969, 97). While Neale's discussion is limited to religion, I am broadening my notion of mystical adventure to include but not be limited to religion, recognizing that people make meaning outside the confines of religion. Because one of the case studies is located within institutional religion and one is not, I want to liberate the term *mystical adventure* from religious

mysticism, especially its image as a rare experience reserved for the elect and the so-called "holy."

With its capacity to reveal spiritual truths in surprising ways through direct experience, adventure involves "everyday mysticism" as Dorothee Soelle puts it. Rather than gaining knowledge of God through instruction, tradition, books, and doctrines, mysticism is knowledge of God gained through and from one's life experience and attentive practice, a definition which originates with Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure (Soelle 2001, 45-6). Aiming to democratize mystical experience, Soelle argues, "Mystical experience should not be limited to the spiritual zenith of contemplation, as was done at times in the language of the Middle Ages...Mystical elements are also present in ordinary forms of religious, pantheistic, or aesthetic experience" (2001, 14-15). She writes chapters on everyday mystical experiences, for example, of nature, eroticism, and community. Basic mystical experiences involve a sense that the internal is made external and visible—"a dream wants to be told, the 'inner light' wants to shine, the vision has to be shared" (Soelle 2001, 13). Elsewhere she writes, "Some of the essential features of such mystical overwhelmingness is a feeling of being one with all that lives, an immersion or diving into a hitherto unknown whole, a cessation of the ego and a simultaneous discovery of the real self, amazement, and an intense, unfathomable joy. These dimensions are often described as basic mystical experiences" (Soelle 2001, 20). Human beings have these experiences even as children, she claims.

Though Soelle does not address play, her sense of everyday mysticism supports and enriches the notion of adventure in artistic play. First, by recognizing mystical elements in aesthetic experience, she affirms that amazement and discovery are to be

expected in encounters with art, which reconnects with Moore's paradox of "expecting the [U]nexpected" (2004). While most theorists in theological aesthetics discuss revelation through high art, Soelle's work provides a way to address everyday mysticism through practical art. Second, by not limiting mysticism to religion, Soelle's approach to mysticism is wide enough to address both case studies, including InterPlayers who do not use God-language. For instance she writes, "Whether someone believes in God or assumes the existence of a higher being seems irrelevant in the face of a real experience of 'swimming' in God. An answer to such questions adds little or nothing to the experience" (Soelle 2001, 28). Finally, Soelle's work deepens my understanding of why adventure in artistic play is mystical, pointing to commonalities between mysticism and play, including an appreciation for the insufficiency of language, the capacity for wonder and amazement, and deep connections with creativity and transformation.

Using the term *mystical adventure* in relation to artistic play, I refer to a heightened experience evoked, shaped, and informed by the art involved in the practice as well as the practice itself.[1] That experience—full of mystery, risk, promise and uncertainty—is an encounter with the God of the Unexpected. The adventure unfolds as a gift of grace, not pre-determined or guaranteed, yet human participation is fundamentally involved. To explain this, I retrieve Schiller's essay on "aesthetical play," written in 1910, suggesting how the intersection of art and play is old and somehow new.

Taking inspiration from nature, Schiller contrasts the animal at work with the animal at play to eventually discuss imagining through aesthetic forms. When the lion is hungry, its energy creates a goal (i.e., killing and eating prey), whereas when the lion has

[1] The notion of play as mystical is discussed by Diane Ackerman, who argues that rapture and ecstasy are fundamental of what she calls "deep play," as is "transcendence, risk, obsession, pleasure, distractedness, timelessness, and a sense of the holy or sacred" (1999, 16).

energy to spare, it can roar for the sake of roaring or run for the joy of running.

Abundance and freedom make way for what he calls "aesthetical play." Schiller writes:

> The animal *works*, when a privation is the motor of its activity, and it *plays* when the plentitude of force is this motor, when an exuberant life is excited to action…The constraint of superabundance or *physical play*, answers as a transition from the constraint of necessity, or physical seriousness, to aesthetical play; and before shaking off, in the supreme freedom of the beautiful, the joke of any special aim, nature already approaches, at least remotely this independence, by the *free movement* which is itself its own ends and means. (J.C. Friedrich von Schiller, "Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man" in *Literary and Philosophical Essays, French, German and Italian*, edited by C. W. Eliot (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1910] 307)

Schiller references nature to illustrate how imagination, which is also a wild and abundant energy, makes the leap into aesthetical play as it finds form and creates beauty.[2] In finding an object to call beautiful, a person's imagining gives way to form, endowing the object with personality, creating it as it were. The object provides the finder with "the occasion of acting," expressing and thereby bringing into sensual existence something internal to the finder (Schiller 1910, 308). Schiller explains, "Independently of the use to which it is destined, the object ought also to reflect the enlightened intelligence which imagines it, the hand which shaped it with affection, the mind free and serene which chose it and exposed it to view…" (Schiller 1910, 309). He gives the examples of Germans searching for magnificent furs and Calcedonians, the prettiest of shells. The beauty of the forms that a person finds slowly transforms the person from the outside in, as the "beautiful becomes itself an object of man's [sic] exertions" (Schiller 1910, 309). While the concept of finding form is common in aesthetics, what makes Schiller appropriate for this project is his rare recognition of imagination finding form in practical

[2] Neale interprets the abundance of imagination as the "discharge of energy" and it being given form as the "design of experience." As these psychological needs are met, he argues, it creates inner harmony. I return to Schiller because his language comes from aesthetics, which is more helpful to this project.

art—beautiful adornments for the body and furniture as opposed to high art—and linking it to play.

Schiller's notion of imagining that gives way to aesthetic forms (which is lost in Neale's interpretation of Schiller's work) is critical to artistic play. As people engage in art, if their imagining finds form through it, adventure can unfold and inner truth can be revealed.[3] This is part of the human participation in adventure I referred to earlier. In this chapter, I review the case studies to show how art allows people to find form for their imaginative capacity and (I add later) how art releases the imagination (as Greene says [1995]). By drawing on his work, I return Schiller to the field of aesthetic education, his original topic. His work makes less sense as the core of a psychology of religion as Neale uses it, than part of a practical theology of play through art as I use it. I am more modest in using Schiller's work than Schiller himself, who argues that the creation of beauty through aesthetical play is the basis of morality in its highest form. I am making a less lofty argument.

In light of the above discussion, I would like to nuance to my original definition of artistic play: the practice of exploration through art forms in which one opens oneself to unexpected transcendence, delight, or discovery. In being open to the potential of artistic play, a person invites the possibility of engaging in a whole-bodied mystical adventure that gives form to and releases imagination and creativity. In so doing, a person can experience unexpected transcendence, delight, or discovery, which can transform habitual patterns that limit thought, emotion, or behavior.

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[3] The case studies expand Gerardus van der Leeuw's assumption that the process of making art is revelatory. While he focuses on the *making* of fine art, the case studies suggest that revelation can also happen while *engaging* art, as imagining finds aesthetic expression, which Schiller argues is a form of "making."

To be clear, the major contribution of this project does not necessarily lie in the notion of mystical adventure, since describing play as adventure and play as mystical experience are not new. However, I wish to distinguish the practice of artistic play from a heightened experience of it, that of mystical adventure. The significant work of this research has been to explore the question of how—how the practice opens a person up to and allows him/her to explore mystical adventure, the gift of artistic play. My original research question remains: "How does artistic play allow humans to seek the God of the Unexpected?"

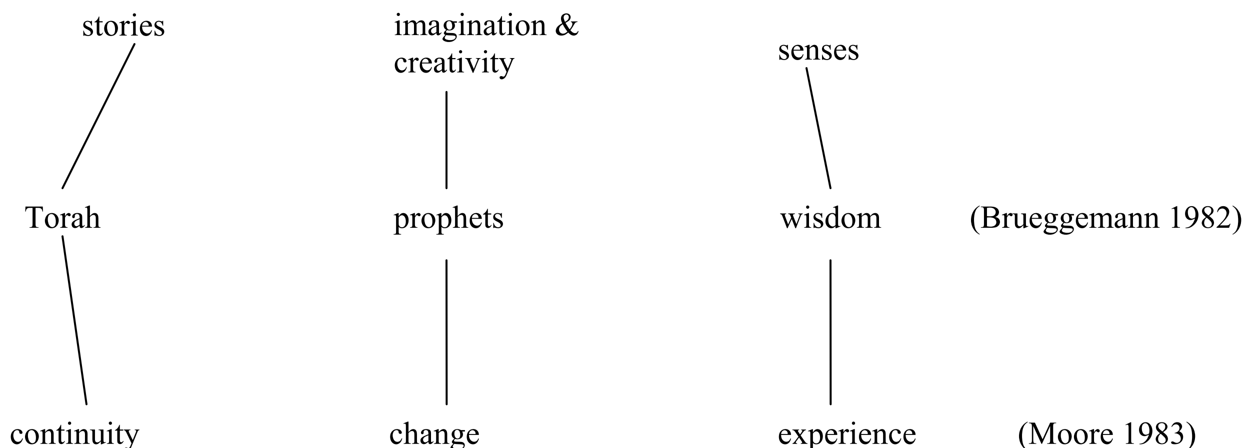
The various types of artistic play explored in this dissertation provide three answers to my central research question. Mom's art shows that artistic play allows humans to seek the God of the Unexpected by sparking people's imaginative capacity, the Garden Angels, by making space. InterPlay's art does this by creating a life-world. These responses attest to the human role in seeking mystery, creating the conditions for mystical adventure—how a person can "sneak up on God," to borrow a phrase from Phil Porter. He explained,

> [O]ne of the ways that InterPlay works [is] you sneak up on stuff…[I]f you went to church, what you do is you would hold the God picture up and ask people to either match that or rise to it or see it or just take it for granted. And I think what we're doing in InterPlay is we're sneaking up on God…It's not one experience. I mean it could just be delight. It could be that we're having so much fun, we're laughing so much. But it could also be that something was really profound. At one point, I started to recognize that some of the profound moments were the places we were laughing and crying at the same time. And I think of that as a God moment…[I]t's not a requirement you create God moments, but I think we like it when it happens. And at some levels, we're moving toward that. (Porter 2008)

Phil's notion of "sneaking up on God" is a wonderful contrast with the image of God sneaking up on humans, which is a more traditional way of imagining revelation. By

creating moments for God to reveal Godself through artistic play, perhaps the player feels God's delight at the opportunity. How could God not cherish humanity's ability to create avenues for Unexpected grace and wisdom in the world through art and play? Perhaps in that moment of encounter with the Unexpected, no one can say who has sneaked up on whom.

Drawing from all of the examples presented, this final chapter focuses on the human role of creating the conditions for mystical adventure—how humans sneak up on God or how humans invite God to sneak up on humanity in artistic play. I address three modes that I trace across the cases: stories, imagination and creativity, and the senses. These modes could be linked with models that others have proposed:[4]



This diagram suggests that each stream (e.g., stories-Torah-continuity) represents an aspect of religious education, and together all three streams function dynamically to form an individual and community. Stories are generated from the material of life, including personal or communal histories, allowing people to gain a sense of coherence between the past, present, and future. Imagination and creativity tend to turn the status quo upside

[4] I appreciate Theodore Brelsford's insight on these parallels.

down, much like the Biblical prophets called the Hebrews to change. Finally, the senses shape perception and ultimately practical wisdom and experience. Just as Walter Brueggemann argues for the interrelatedness of Torah, prophets, and wisdom, and likewise Mary Elizabeth Moore for the interaction of continuity, change, and experience, so too is there interrelationship between stories, imagination and creativity as well as the senses. In fact, they are often inseparable in artistic play.

Practicing Stories: Toward a Storied Epistemology

The examples addressed in this dissertation illustrate communities practicing stories through artistic play—people creating, playing with, embodying, and performing what Lorraine Code calls "personal, local histories." As discussed in the Method section, Code argues that knowledge is situated, locally produced, and shaped by context. There are no theories that are "spoken from no where and as if by no one in particular," she writes (Code 1995, 155). Instead, she argues for a "storied epistemology," which makes transparent the details of how, why, and by whom knowledge is produced.[5]

Building on Jonathan Rhee's definition of story as a "sequence of actions and experiences by one or more characters" (1987, 8), Code emphasizes "the *poiesis* (= making) function of stories, where the 'character(s)' are at once the artificers and the artifacts of 'their' actions and experiences" (Code 1995, 159). Code's *poietic* notion of story resonates with my discussion of adventure, in that the player is both the creator (at

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[5] Discussing historical-genealogies, Code calls them stories "that map the process out of which certain kinds of knowledge come to hold sway as exemplary and theory-shaping; stories that expose the complex interconnections between examples and theories" (Code 1995, 155). While this dissertation does not deal with the same kinds of stories as Code, her approach to story is still illuminating since Mom's art, the Garden Angels, and InterPlay involve people constructing knowledge through story.

least as far as the human role in the creative process is concerned) and the product of adventure, which is story driven. Mystical adventure in this project's examples involves a foray into uncharted territory of a storied epistemology of who God is and who human beings are, have been, or will be. It is the adventure of making something in the storied world of art that has never before existed, a new knowing so personal and compelling that it feels like a mysterious gift. Or it is sometimes the adventure of "returning" to subsequent unfoldings of the story to experience it anew in perhaps an unexpected way.

In Mom's art, the objects themselves embody stories—the internment of Japanese Americans in the case of the *Pottery of Tears* and the story of the twenty-six martyrs in the case of the *yukata*—functioning as gateways to possible mystical adventure. Crossing the threshold that is the *Pottery of Tears*, members of the congregation have the opportunity to take an imaginative pilgrimage to the internment camps or through the *yukata,* to participate in the pilgrimage of the twenty-six martyrs. In each story, there is the danger of reliving the suffering of the ancestors by "remembering the dismembered," as discussed by Moore (2004), but there is also the potential of being transformed by it as they are drawn into the art.

The art objects themselves are not solely responsible for setting the conditions for mystical adventure or for "telling" the full story. While these are storied objects, how the stories are perceived depends also on the context in which the objects are seen and how they are framed performatively. Recall how much it matters that the *Pottery of Tears* is seen in the context of Holy Communion. For *Floating Saints*, it matters how the *yukata* are displayed, what is preached, and how the architecture contributes to the installation.

Frank Burch Brown attempts to account for context by discussing the "aesthetic milieu" in which art is seen as well as non-aesthetic considerations. In his analysis, "The aesthetic milieu…comprises everything in focal or subsidiary awareness that, within a particular context, is either immediately or mediately aesthetic in effect" (Burch Brown 1989, 55). For example, the fact that the architecture of the SJUMC sanctuary is reminiscent of a feudal Japanese castle contributes to the aesthetic milieu of *Floating Saints*. Burch Brown also argues that aesthetic perception is based on non-aesthetic factors. For example, seeing a replica of the Chartres Cathedral in "Medieval World" at Disneyland does not produce the same aesthetic experience of seeing the historical cathedral in France in its original context. He explains, "The aesthetic object is constituted not just by *what* is seen but by *how* it is seen—that is, by what it is seen *as*—which depends partly on its whole milieu, including the contexts of perception and various things that we know or think we know" (Burch Brown 1989, 74). It matters, he argues, that a person knows the Disney replica is made from cheap, lightweight materials originally developed for use in space.

In light of Burch Brown, it seems the story-driven adventure that is constructed by Mom's art is a result of the art itself, its milieu, and what a person brings to the art. Any one of these factors could derail or preclude mystical adventure. For example, recall how important form and content are to Mom's art. If the match were not perfect, the art objects would not be as powerfully storied as they are. Practicing stories is an utterly human endeavor to create the most conducive conditions for mystical adventure to unfold with no magic formula, no guarantees.

The stories that Mom's art embodies are transformative, sacred stories. In his forthcoming book, Frank Rogers applies Gabriel Fackre's notion of "canonical stories" to his case study of narratives performed at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) in South Central Los Angeles. Interpreting Fackre, Rogers says canonical stories are "narratives that have paradigmatic authority for a community's sense of identity, integrity, and purpose" (Rogers 2009, 8). While biblical stories are obvious canonical stories for Christian communities, for an African American church like Bethel AME, the biographies of Harriett Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are sacred stories about faith, resistance, and emancipation that function with communal authority. In Rogers' case study, youth create and perform a theatrical play that evokes the stories of African American heroes from their heritage.

Similarly, Mom's art evokes transformative, sacred stories of the Japanese American community. Taking communion with the *Pottery of Tears* creates new, more meaningful sacred stories as Japanese American internment is seen in the light of the Last Supper and visa versa. *Floating Saints* is the practicing of a new sacred story, adding to the community's repertoire of stories about the legacy of Japanese American Christians. Claiming the faith and sacrifice of the Japanese martyrs is a creative extension to the heritage of contemporary Japanese Americans, one that did not exist before Mom's art. The community's "canon" is not simply given by tradition, but in this case is imaginatively constructed through the art. Through her art, Mom claims, tailors, and reinterprets Christian tradition in light of the Japanese American culture so that members of the congregation might engage in a mystical adventure that speaks uniquely to them.

While Mom's art involves storied objects, the Issei Garden involves evoking story both through objects and performativity. The garden itself is a storied object, as are the trees and rocks in it, embodying the communal story of the garden's construction and revitalization, the personal stories of the living and the dead who have been associated with it, and the particular histories of the trees and rocks in the garden. When the Garden Angels care for the Issei Garden, they practice these stories, not only by remembering them but by participating in them through their everyday work. Everyone and everything in this territory of play are characters in this storied world—the trees not simply providing the setting. Recall how affected the Garden Angels felt when a tree was stolen from the Garden. It was like an ancestor, a beloved character of this territory of play once embedded in the landscape that was ripped away. There was a shared sense of mourning among the Garden Angels.

As discussed earlier, because these stories have become sedimented in the landscape, they have become spatial stories.

In addition, the performativity of the Garden Angels points to, makes present, and revitalizes the essence of the story of the *issei* pioneers by embodying the hard work and sacrifice of those who have come before. Through the work of the Garden Angels, one senses that the spirits of the *issei* are kept alive, that their legacy has not been lost, even as the *nisei* Garden Angels are living out their own story to be passed on. The story of the construction and the revitalization of the garden is a sacred story much like the narratives of internment and the twenty-six martyrs, but the story of the garden is constantly visible because it is embodied in this space and is practiced faithfully each week.

In the Issei Garden, mystical adventure is a heightened experience of pruning the trees, allowing oneself to become a part of the tree's story in the moment of the practice. Recall Mark (2008) describing his sense of "The tree is me." Becoming totally present to the tree, its growth, its history, and its soul is a mystical experience, not necessarily named by the practitioner in terms of God but felt as oneness with reality. Soelle describes this as the "feeling of being one with all that lives, an immersion or diving into a hitherto unknown whole" (2001, 20). Christian and Buddhist Garden Angels alike experience this.

While the sense of oneness accounts for the mystical element of pruning trees in the Issei Garden, the adventure of it involves the danger of pruning incorrectly or too aggressively, violating the integrity of the tree. Novices are often so afraid of making a mistake, they fail to experience the flow of SEEING, never experiencing the sense of mystical adventure. More expert pruners, like Brian, engage in the adventure of discerning moment by moment how to shape the growth of the tree, how to "make the tree happy," which makes him happy (Brian 2008). In this form of artistic play there is also the risk of being in contact with the dead—either in the form of memories of those who have passed or through contact with ghostly matter, which can speak or make known its demands.[6] Remember that I was not alone in experiencing the ghostly call of the trees to be tended, though it took years before they were finally heeded by Brian, Uncle Ed, and then others. Now the Garden Angels are in constant relationship with the ghostly

[6] The risk of being in contact with trees as ghostly matter is similar to the dangers of calling home the ghostly martyrs to inhabit the SJUMC sanctuary for a time. However, the Garden Angels are perhaps at even greater risk because they have regular physical contact with the trees and develop a deeper relationship with them over time.

trees, attuning themselves to them and listening to their stories even as they participate in shaping them.

While mystical adventure experienced through Mom's art might take seconds, the adventure unfolds slowly in the garden—season after season, year after year, as Garden Angels return to the same trees. In some ways, the Issei Garden is a tiny world of play unto itself and therefore shares similarities with the life-world that InterPlay creates, though the latter is more complex. Within each, people play with the me/not-me and the real/not-real, which I discuss below.

InterPlay establishes a life-world in which stories are performed, witnessed, and received. This life-world involves the making of space, though not exactly like the Issei Garden. InterPlayce (and other spaces in which InterPlay is practiced) function(s) more like a temporary "container" for stories, as Phil and Cynthia describe it. It is a performance space, like a theater, a black box, or a workshop dedicated to playing with the "building blocks of creation" as Phil says (Porter 2008). This form of artistic play does not involve the sedimentation of stories in the space itself as in the Issei Garden. In fact, the stories performed in the practice are ephemeral—created once and never seen again, flowing in and out of the space. Sacred, canonical stories are not performed here as they are at SJUMC, rather personal stories reveal the everyday sacred and are transformative for performer and audience.

One might think that InterPlay involves no storied art objects like Mom's art, but in this practice the bodies of the performers are the art objects. Sharon (2008) explained to me that InterPlayers become the art in the space. Even the aesthetic milieu contributes to this perception in that the walls of the InterPlayce studio are bare, and there is little

visual art kept there permanently, which ensures no competition with the bodies in performance. For example, when people practice Shape and Stillness, which involves people making shapes and holding them, the bodies appear as moving sculptures in a gallery. And because bodies are storied, they communicate stories to one degree or another even when the performer is silent or still. For example, the body of a wheel-chair bound InterPlayer tells a story as much as a tree in the Issei Garden or the Christ *yukata*. Yet at the same time, members of the audience also project their own stories onto performing bodies, which may have nothing to do with what the artist intends, much like other experiences of viewing or hearing other kinds of performing art.

In addition, the body of the performer also becomes an art object to him or herself. As the InterPlayer explores a new range of performance, (s)he might surprise herself. Recall how Elizabeth was surprised by the conviction with which she performed her story about hiking in the mountains. In that moment, she was both the storyteller, as well as observer to her own body as art object. Recall Cathy's Big Body Story about discovering the joy of twirling, Susan's story of Harriet Tubman and its significance, or Steven's story about his relationship with his father. In every case, people were exploring the stories of their lives as they were performing them, "showing themselves to themselves" as Myerhoff says (1986) but also noticing what the body knows in performing the story.

The mystical adventure of InterPlay is the adventure of making and performing stories from the stuff of life and allowing it to become more than one expected. There are inherent risks to creating and performing in the moment—the risk of being seen and known, of trusting the availability of resources on hand, and of feeling awkward, foolish,

or self-conscious. However, there is also the opportunity to participate in serendipitous creativity (Kaufman 1993), to surrender to the creative "impulse of love" as Sharon (2008) says, and to experience the mysterious transformation of self and audience. Between the two case studies, InterPlay is more intentional about indirectly seeking mystery, developing an entire life-world—space, structure, language, leadership, a community, and God-images—that supports the process of seeking the Unexpected. The practice trains people to sneak up on God by inculcating a willingness to explore physicality as a means of accessing mystery, to play with kinesthetic God-images, to be taken by surprise, to play at your own risk for the sake of the possible, and to participate in the serendipitous creativity of making up and performing stories.

In light of neuroscience, it should be no surprise that practicing stories through artistic play is closely linked to meaning-making. Neurological research suggests that the human brain is hardwired to make sense of the world through stories. Human beings tend to think in terms of story (Haven 2007). Kendall Haven argues, "Human minds use a specific story structure to impose order onto narrative and experiential information" (2007, 44). In other words, people cannot refrain from story making or interpreting experience through stories.

The case studies suggest that practicing stories through artistic play is vital to constructing spiritual knowledge for individuals and communities. The unfolding of story and the participation in it as mystical adventure create knowledge of who God is and who human beings are—whether the story is performed is over and over as in Mom's art and the Issei Garden or one time only as in InterPlay. The storied epistemology that is constructed transforms people precisely because it is personal, local, and unique to the

people involved and also because it emerges from their imaginative and creative capacities, yet it is experienced as "other," as a gift of mystery. Practicing stories through artistic play can be powerful especially for marginalized communities, whose stories have been suppressed, destroyed, or discounted. For these communities, spiritual survival depends on the vitality of practicing stories, which gives them access to spiritual knowing that they have been denied.

Imagination, Creativity, and Limiting Patterns

Practicing stories as discussed above assumes that imagination and creativity are at work in the community. In this section, I examine these dynamics before discussing how imagination and creativity help challenge habitual patterns that limit thought, emotion, or behavior.

The Dynamics of Imagination and Creativity

Earlier I concluded that when church members agree to play "What is it?" or "Pretending to Be," they approach the world of the *Pottery of Tears* and *Floating Saints*, where imagining the story might take them on a mystical adventure. David Hogue writes,

> Imagination is the distinctively human capacity to envision multiple alternative realities, scenarios, and outcomes. It involves the ability to represent, internally and symbolically, scenarios and configurations of space and time that are not immediately represented to the senses.
>
> Imagination frees us from the tyranny of the present, of the logical, of the "real." It also frees us from the constraints of the now, as it pictures what events were like in the historic past or what they might become in the future. (David Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain* [Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003], 44-5)

Imagining the story makes the world of art come alive, feel real, and take on meaning. Hogue argues that listening to a story in worship, watching a play, or reading a novel triggers the brain's capacity for empathic participation. As listeners "[we are] mentally rehearsing the same performance of characters in the story are enacting. We identify ourselves with them. For a time at least, we have entered another world. We are participating imaginatively in another's story" (Hogue 2003, 100).

The capacity to imagine is not only involved in being an audience to stories, it is also involved in creating or performing stories. For example, Hogue discusses how storytelling always involves re-writing the story, as the teller selectively interprets events in their reporting, which determines the meaning of the story (2003, 105-6). In either case—whether a story is being heard or told—imagining is vital to storied epistemology. As Maxine Greene writes, "Imagination allows us to particularize, to see and hear things in their concreteness" ([1995] 2000, 29). In other words, imagining is what makes storied epistemology personal yet paradoxically intersubjective as the story is created, performed, or embodied in community.

In contrast to Haven and Hogue, who explain the power of story and imagination through brain science, Schiller argues that play ensues when people's imagining finds form through aesthetica. Objects found to be beautiful are "made" by the finder, expressing something essential of the self, what Schiller calls the "enlightened intelligence" that imagines the object (1910, 309). Schiller's argument readily applies to the Issei Garden, where the landscape is an imaginative construction of what a Japanese garden looks and feels like. As an art object, the garden reflects the creativity, longings, and aesthetics of those who tend it. People's imagining finds form in Mom's art as well,

as they "create" the art and as their engagement with these storied objects makes the art more beautiful and meaningful. Recall how Alex's sense of the "ugly" communion ware changed as he began to see the *Pottery of Tears* in light of the internment experience. And remember how the *yukata* gain power as they are transformed from everyday garments to the ghostly martyrs, as people "make" them into symbols of Japanese Christian faith. In the case of InterPlay, the performers' imagining finds form in the stories that they tell. Elizabeth imagines herself re-climbing the mountain, and Susan imagines herself as Harriet Tubman.

Schiller's notion of imagination finding form resonates with Frank Burch Brown's argument for the imaginative "plenishment" of art (1989*,* 52). According to Burch Brown, people respond not to what the artist actually makes, but to the object they imaginatively constitute on the basis of the work (1989*,* 53). Art is "realized" by different people at different times. Both theorists and this project's examples underscore the creativity of imagining things, which points to the *poietic* nature of imagination. As people's imagining finds form in aesthetica, it seems their creativity is extended. For example, I might bring prior experience as a hiker or a dancer to Elizabeth's performance, which allows my own imagined, body memories to be relived and perhaps embellished. What is created in terms of storied epistemology for both individuals and the community is new and original, since what a person brings to the art either as audience or performer can change over time, even in encountering the same art.

While imagination and creativity can be understood broadly and from multiple disciplines, I find Maria Harris's work (1991) helpful in narrowing the kind of imagination the case studies involve and how it applies to religious education. Harris

discusses "creative imagination," which is a form of religious imagination in so far as it creates new possibilities, tapping into the universal human potential to be creators, as in God's likeness (Harris 1991, 19-22). This approach supports well the previous discussion of the creativity of imagining the storied world of art and the "plenishment" of art in perception (Burch Brown 1989, 52), especially in the case of Mom's art or in witnessing InterPlay performances. In addition, Harris' notion of creative imagination describes what is involved in making and performing art, as in the Issei Garden and InterPlay.

Harris's concept of "contemplative imagination," which I discussed in the context of the Issei Garden, also provides helpful insight about the kind of imagination being discussed. Recall how artistic play in the garden involved attending to, being with, and existing fully in the presence of the otherness of the trees. Contemplative imagination is important to the other examples I have presented. Mom's art also invites confrontation with the radical otherness of the art objects. For example, the question, "What is it?" invites people to "intensify the object," in this case the *Pottery of Tears*, "to grasp the radicalness of its essence" as Harris says (1991, 21). In InterPlay, bodies in performance become objects of contemplation both to performer and to audience. These examples testify that both creative and contemplative imagination can compliment one another and work simultaneously.

Harris's notion of "giving form to imagination" helpfully nuances Schiller in terms of religious education. While he is interested in the first-person experience of imagination finding form, she approaches this from the perspective of an educator seeking to activate learners' capacity to imagine. According to Harris, "giving form to imagination" through teaching involves embodying, giving shape to, or ordering the

subject matter much like an artist (1991*,* 34-5, 46). For example, a teacher might present content through verbal forms, such as metaphors, or through earth forms to teach in and through materiality, the body, and the senses. Harris argues that an educator must learn not just one form, but a repertoire of forms in order to teach, bringing a range of incarnational possibilities to a given subject (1991, 46). This allows learners' to find form for their imagining through at least one of multiple ways. In light of Harris, all of the examples in this dissertation involve communities giving people forms through which imagination can take flight—be they art objects, the garden, or InterPlay.

Maxine Greene, who is also interested in education through the arts, argues that art "releases the imagination" (1995). People live in a world saturated by electronic media, which unlike art, freezes people's imaginative thinking through repeated exposure to "predigested concepts and images in fixed frameworks" (Greene [1995] 2000*,* 124). Because people are constantly bombarded with media images, she says, "Ideas of possibilities are trapped in predictability. But our imagination…obviously deals in unpredictabilities, in the unexpected. It then requires reflectiveness on our part to acknowledge the existence of these unexpected and unpredictable vistas and perspectives in our experiences" (Greene [1995] 2000*,* 124-5). Greene is touching on the need for learners to open up to unpredictability through the arts, believing that reaching toward something new or unknown is vital for learning. She argues, "It is my conviction that informed engagements with several of the arts is the most likely mode of releasing our students' (or any person's) imaginative capacity and giving it play. However, this will not, cannot, happen automatically or 'naturally'" (Greene [1995] 2000*,* 125). She refers to helping people "constitute a fictive world imaginatively and entering into it

perceptively, affectively, and cognitively" (Greene [1995] 2000, 125). Illustrating well Greene's thesis, the case studies explored how artistic play as a deliberate practice allows humans to sneak up on the Unexpected.

While I agree with Greene's argument that art releases the imagination, these case studies suggest that releasing the imagination through art is not as free as one might think. In *Floating Saints*, people's capacity to play with new God-images proposed by the *yukata* crucifix is constrained. The traditional images of Christ are so dominant that it is virtually impossible for people to imagine a Japanese Jesus, even if suggested by the art. Data from this project supported Lee's argument that the creative potential of Asian Americans is limited because of racism.

According to Robert Orsi, religious imagination is constrained by habitus but serves as its genesis. While Lee only addresses how racism limits creative potential (racism being an aspect of habitus), Orsi takes a wider view. He writes:

> What is called for is an approach to religion and culture that embeds the religious person and community in history, that sees history and culture not as something that religious persons are "in" but as the media through which they fundamentally are, and that also understands the power of cultural structures and inherited idioms—what Pierre Bourdieu has called "habitus"—both to shape and discipline thought as well as to give rise to religious creativity and improvisation.[7] What is called for, in other words, is the recognition that it is the historicized and encultured religious imagination that is also the imagination by means of which, in Marx's famous expression, "the frozen circumstances of our worlds are forced to dance by our singing to them their own melodies." (Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion" in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, edited by D. D. Hall [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997], 16-17)

Orsi's argument causes me to think that Mom's art attempts to unfreeze inherited images of God, "singing to them their own melodies," by shining a critical light on them. Recall

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[7] The author cites Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

how several members of the congregation became critically aware of their own indoctrination into the image of the Euro Jesus crucified, when I asked them to choose between it and the *yukata* crucifix. Their imaginative capacity is shaped by the local habitus, which includes a legacy of internalized racism and colonialism. However, the art opens the possibility for religious creativity and improvisation. As discussed, members of the congregation articulated several creative interpretations of the *yukata* crucifix, which came as a surprise in my research.

Mom's art releases the imagination, but in ways that are limited by habitus. Describing this tension between creativity and constraint in terms of improvisation, Orsi writes, "Human beings at work on the world in the available religious idioms of their time and place are doing what they can with what they have at hand" (1997*,* 16). People are constantly faced with social contradictions, such as racism and colonialism in the case of SJUMC, and they have inherited God-images that separate faith from culture. Though the *Pottery of Tears* and *Floating Saints* does not liberate people from the legacy of oppression they inherited, Mom's art does what it can with what is at hand, stretching people toward more culturally relevant God-images. Orsi argues, "Rather, religion enables [people] to do what they can in and through these [harsh social] realities, for while there are preconditions to our experience, our '*experience* of these preconditions is not entirely preconditioned,' as Michael Jackson writes, and so we continually vacillate 'between a sense of ourselves as subjects *and* as objects[,]… making us feel sometimes that we are world-makers, sometimes that we are merely made by the world'" (Jackson 1996, 10, 21; Orsi 1997*,* 16). Orsi's reference to vacillating between a sense of self as subject and object confirms what the cases suggest—that imagination operates through

fluctuation between tension and release, which I addressed in terms of Girls' Day and *Floating Saints*. Jackson's description of wavering between feeling that humans are world-makers and that humans are merely made by the world reconnects with the notion of storied epistemology, when Code describes people as characters in a story where they are both the artificers and the artifacts of their actions and experiences (1995, 159).

So far, I have established that artistic play gives form to people's imagining and their imagination is released through art. However, imagination is released not as a free flood but as a to-and-fro force shaped by habitus. Because imagination fluctuates between tension and release, mystical adventure is not necessarily a continuous reverie induced by artistic play, as one might have assumed. The teetering dynamic of imagination is probably what makes mystical adventure "safe enough but dangerous enough" to use Cynthia's words.

This project's examples suggest that the back-and-forth character of imagination that pervades artistic play has two causes—the nature of transitional phenomena (Winnicott 1971), in which a person vacillates between the me and not-me, and what is created by the play frame (Bateson 1987), which creates a back-and-forth sense of the real and the not-real. In each of the case studies, I explored both these dynamics extensively. Though I focused on transitional phenomena and transitional objects in the case of SJUMC and my family, the ebb and flow between the sense of me and not-me can be found in InterPlay. At times, the new, experimental self created in performance becomes the object of oneself, and at other times the performing self experiences no sense of separation, allowing the performer to teeter back and forth between moments of objectivity and subjectivity. This happens in the transitional space created by the

practice, as the community witnesses the performer and provides affirmation through mirroring, which was discussed earlier. All this happens in addition to the fluctuating sense of the real/not-real created by the play frame, which allows people to creatively construct a self through imagination.

I explored how the *Pottery of Tears*, *Floating Saints*, and the Issei Garden involve transitional objects that allow people to play with the vacillating sense of the me and the not-me of being a Japanese American Christian. All the examples relating to SJUMC had some element of playing "pretend," which is why imagination is also released through the fluctuating feeling between the real and the not-real. The ghostly trees, the ghostly martyrs, and the drinking of blood from the *Pottery of Tears* are somehow real and not-real. Briefly I addressed how the play frame of the Issei Garden is made visible by the borders of the garden itself, however a play frame exists for Mom's art as well. The *Pottery of Tears* or the *yukata* would not create the same meaning outside the context of the SJUMC sanctuary and its liturgy, which communicate the message "This is play" when it comes to Mom's art. Tom Driver describes ritual "workful play," in that ritual's transformation work (or in this case liturgy's transformative work) is accomplished through play (1991, 99).[8]

Disturbing Patterns through Imagination and Creativity

By entering the fictive (and not so fictive), storied world of art, people engage in mystical adventure, where the vacillation of imagination shakes free habits that limit thought, emotion, or behavior. Because it deals in unpredictabilities, argues Greene,

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[8] Driver contrasts ritual with art, which he argues is playful work. According to Driver, art approached as work is at risk for becoming to serious and thereby becoming empty (1991, 99), however, he addresses art for its own sake, which is not primarily the kind of art being discussed here.

imagination more than any other capacity interrupts the "inertia of habit" that John Dewey warns against (Dewey 1934, 27; Greene [1995] 2000, 21). Mom's art disturbs everyday patterns of seeing, presenting what people would not expect—"ugly" communion ware instead of fine gold or silver, garments hanging from the ceiling of the sanctuary instead of in the closet. They create moments of what Greene calls "wide-awakenness" (1978, 162). For example, a man who was singing for a short time in the SJUMC choir was so moved by the *Pottery of Tears*, he took communion for the first time. The experience was so meaningful that he came to express his appreciation to Mom. Evidently the art awakened something in this man, making him view the Eucharist as never before.

Mom's art in partnership with Wayne Osaki's architectural design upsets the unexamined and taken-for-granted European aesthetic that the church inherited from a denomination dominated by those of European descent. L. Edward Phillips (2009) argues that traditional types of Protestant worship are designed to elevate a person's awareness of Beauty as idealized through a European aesthetic. Although SJUMC does not have gothic architecture, it conforms to a liturgy that strives to evoke a sense of awe in the congregants through a European aesthetic, which Phillips describes as wordy and ostentatious. Like most traditional worship services, SJUMC has acolytes, a robed choir, and a liturgy that begins with a choral introit and ends with a benediction. Phillip argues that the imposition of a European aesthetic in American liturgy in the nineteenth century was a thinly veiled form of classism, intended to keep those with more education and culture in the pews. I would add it also has a racist dimension, since the imposition of a European aesthetic was (and is) to exclusion of other cultural aesthetics. It is poignant

that racial/ethnic minority churches in mainline Protestant denominations like SJUMC have unknowingly internalized racism in its very liturgy.

Despite the constraints of habitus, Mom's art does what it can to challenge the dominance of European aesthetics in the sanctuary of SJUMC and to unfreeze religious imagination. Quietly and single-handedly, she continues to subvert it by introducing Japanese art, some of which is Buddhist in origin. For example, she is responsible for selecting and overseeing the purchase of the church's baptismal font, a stone *tsukubai* commonly found in Japanese tea gardens and in Buddhist temples for ablutions, but used for baptism by Underground Christians in Japan (*kakure kirishitan*). Throughout the Prohibition, which lasted 300 years, a few Buddhist temples (e.g., Risshoji Temple in Kanazawa) gave sanctuary to the Underground Christians, maintaining space in their cemeteries for Christian rituals, including baptism (Nobuaki Hanaoka, e-mail message to author, 2 June 2009).

Artistic play in the Issei Garden has allowed even greater opportunity for freedom from certain limits on imagination, as people's capacity to imagine is less hindered by Western Christian liturgy, its symbols, and aesthetics. In creating a space that one could imagine as a piece of Japan, people are freer to play with "Pretending to Be" Japanese. As discussed, Garden Angels have the opportunity to explore pruning as a form of meditation, to approach their Buddhist and Confucian spiritual roots through being and doing, which might not be possible inside the sanctuary. The revitalization of the garden is a sacred, communal story about transformation from a state of perpetual neglect to a state of vitality. What was once taken for granted for many years has been re-imagined, made alive, and given new meaning through devoted attention to and intimate

relationship with it.

In the case of InterPlay, the practice involves imagination and creativity finding form, being released, and freeing people from limiting ways of thinking, feeling, and doing. The shift of agreements that happens in InterPlay transitions people out of comfortable patterns. Forms are designed to move participants incrementally out of the serious, achievement-oriented, self-conscious work world, where people are "in their heads" all the time, everything "counts," and risk is to be minimized. Unlike SJUMC, there is consciousness in the InterPlay community about being held captive by limiting patterns, the value of surprise, and the possibility of transformation by doing things that might not feel comfortable. There is InterPlay language for talking about these issues, including the notion of "sneaking up" on things, "holding things lightly," and "easy focus." All these concepts refer to strategies to playfully subvert habits of thinking, feeling, and doing.

Challenging patterns that limit thinking, feeling, and doing, artistic play is a form of resistance, a way of acting in the world and possibly transforming it. SJUMC and InterPlay are marginalized communities, the former because of race and the latter because participants are mostly women, gay men, and others who hold the minority view that bodies are a source of trusted wisdom. Mom's art resists internalized racism and colonialism, but the Garden Angels also engage in a form of resistance, pushing back against the inertia of cultural forgetting that can come with integration and out-marriage. Artistic play in the garden also resists the illusion of purity of Japanese American Christian spirituality, allowing instead hybridity to find form in the pruning of trees. Finally, in the other case study, InterPlay is also a form of resistance, as InterPlayers aim

to change the world body by body, "infiltrating" (as Cynthia says) and transforming communities, institutions, and corporations with "bodywisdom."

Soelle argues that resistance is mysticism. She envisions a mysticism that involves both contemplation and activity, rooted in understanding the relationship to God as a mutuality of receiving and giving (Soelle 2001, 201). Soelle's approach inspires me to think of mystical adventure not merely an imaginative vision received, but also a doing and a giving to the world that resists habits of inertia. Performance analysis of both case studies shows that the <u>doing</u> of artistic play creates something new—fresh ways of thinking, feeling, or doing that resist a range of captivities. Soelle's examples of resistance as mysticism involve cases of oppression such as American Quakers helping slaves escape to freedom, Caesar Chavez leading the American farmworkers movement, or the nonviolent resistance of economic boycott in South Africa. The case studies, which mostly involve upper middle class, educated Americans, do not involve the degree of oppression and dramatic heroism that Soelle discusses, nor do they involve a similar kind of consciousness about resistance and social justice. However, the resistance of artistic play in the case studies illustrates well the kind of everyday mysticism that Soelle argues for in the first half of her book. Engaging with the arts allows people to envision and long for a different world, without which there would be no resistance. Through artistic play people can sneak up on liberation contained in the experiences they are missing, of which they may only be dimly aware (if at all) before mystical adventure unfolds.

Mom's art and the Issei Garden are examples of imagination finding form to express missing experience both individual and communal, which frees people from

limiting patterns and engages them in resistance. As Wright proposes, creative acts, including play with transitional objects, is an attempt to find the appropriate medium for expressing missing experience (2001, 82-83). I argued that in experiencing a match between form and content in the *Pottery of Tears*, some church members find an appropriate medium for memorializing those who were interned in a way that resonates with their faith. Through artistic play, members of SJUMC are creating a real/not real world where faith and culture are reconciled in worship, where God is not only a White God, and where the suffering of the community's saints, who happen to be born of Japanese descent, counts in an expanded vision of the Kingdom of God. Through artistic play, Garden Angels are creating a territory of play where Japanese Americans learn to feel comfortable in their own skin as Christians with a Buddhist/Confucian spiritual heritage, where the ancestors are tended with care, and where memories are kept alive. Every week, Garden Angels who work in the Issei Garden have the opportunity to learn to be Japanese and do what is Japanese—both in terms of aesthetics and performativity, even if it is guided by imagining what is Japanese. Artistic play in the Issei Garden provides people with a cultural and spiritual experience that is vanishing with every generation.

As in the case of SJUMC, InterPlay allows people to express missing experience as imagination and creativity find form and are released.[9] Improvisation gives InterPlayers the opportunity to create and to experience what has been absent in their lives—the joy of twirling for Cathy, the chance for Steven to dance with his father, or Susan the means to become the heroine Harriet Tubman. Remember also Coke's

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[9] Imagination and creativity are closely related. Allowing imagination to find form in ways that express missing experience is highly creative, which is why Winnicott (1971) attributed to living creatively to play.

poignant description of God as the InterPlay floor, which invites her to "have herself"—in other words, to have the wholeness of her self that has been missing. Through witnessing, the practice also provides participants to experience being seen and affirmed, a need Winnicott says that humans never outgrow. Winnicott argues that too many of people were deprived of proper mirroring in their childhood development.

On the level of community, InterPlay creates a life-world based on values that are not dominant in the culture, thereby allowing members of the community to express missing experience through a new thinking, feeling, and doing. Recall how the comprehensive life-world that is InterPlay includes self, community, leadership, place, language, and structure—all of which represent some of what is missing in the wider world. The playful, open, risk-taking adult self and the availability of a mentoring community cultivated by InterPlay are largely absent in American culture, which is dominated by the Protestant work ethic and rugged individualism. Most communities lack forms and places for people to express their stories and receive affirmation. There is even a lack in the English language to express the missing experience that InterPlay provides opportunity to express, which is why InterPlay has coined its own terms.

In the case studies, imagination and creativity have found form through art because the community has needed the missing experience artistic play allows them to express. However, in no case are people fully aware of what experience is missing prior to engaging in artistic play, therefore the unexpected encounter with the missing can feel transformative and deep, as if God has sneaked up on them and given them what they need. Some might be aware of the habitual patterns that limit their thinking, feeling or doing. For example, Steven was articulate about his recurrent fear about his father's

death, but he did not know what was missing in his experience of the issue until after his focus session was over. This risky, daring journey into the storied world of art for the sake of what is needed but not fully known is what mystical adventure entails. The engagement with art and the capacity to improvise on motifs, melodies, and patterns allow these communities to indirectly seek the missing experience for which they hunger.

In both case studies, people gain a sense of agency through artistic play, as people express missing experience. Both individuals and communities are more whole because of it. Greene writes, "[T]he role of imagination is…to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected. The arts, as Denis Donoghue says, are on the margin, 'and the margin is the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn't have a place for and mostly seems to suppress…With the arts, people can make a space for themselves and fill it with intimations of freedom and presence'" (Donoghue 1984, 129; Greene [1995] 2000, 28). Greene argues that the arts give people a sense of freedom and presence by allowing imagination to disclose what has no place or is suppressed in daily life. Without a doubt, SJUMC and InterPlay involve arts on the margin. Envisioning a world where marginality is affirmed, Greene writes, "Art from other cultures—South Indian dance, Mayan creation myths, Chippewa weaving, Balinese puppets—may be given honored places on the margin, as individuals are gradually enabled to bring this art alive in their experience, as they are gradually freed to let imagination do its work" (Greene [1995] 2000, 28). She argues that such art would illumine new kinds of knowing that have long been missing.

Given all that artistic play creates and does, I return to Wolterstorff's notion of art and action (1980), which I now build upon. As discussed in the Introduction, he

argues that works of art are objects and instruments of action, ways of acting in the world. Art equips people for action. His analysis of the divine work that artists do best illumines Mom's art, which can be understood as her means of acting in the world, (i.e., inspiring people to reflect on what it means to be Japanese American Christians). Her art points to a new way of being in the world in light of mystical adventure experienced through the art. Wolterstorff would explain Mom's art in terms of "world-projection," providing an escape to an imaginary world where the person suspends disbelief because the envisaged world is incompatible with the actual world (1980*,* 123). In his analysis, the art makes a claim about the actual world through fictional world projection, which would seem to apply to Mom's art as a critique of racism and colonialism.

While Wolterstorff uses the metaphor of projection, I have used the image of gateway or entrance into mystical adventure. In any case, we are both referring to an imaginative world created in part by engagement with the art. We agree that experience in this other-world of art can be transformative. For example, Wolterstorff argues that world-projection confirms what the community feels to be real and important (e.g., self image, history) and makes it concrete, or it illuminates and thereby changes convictions (1980*,* 144, 146). According to Wolterstorff, the world-projection of art can provide a world that does not exist but is in some ways better, provokes emotions, provides models for behavior, allows the artist to communicate with an audience, and offers consolation in the face of sorrow (1980*,* 148-9). As an objectivist interested in avoiding psychologism, Wolterstorff does not account for what people bring to the encounter with art, which I have better accounted for through Schiller and Burch Brown. The problem with Wolterstorff's notion of world projection is that it seems to be pre-determined by the art

and passively received by the audience.

The case studies expand Wolterstorff's notion of art in action by suggesting a more active role for the audience in creating of the storied, fictive world of art as imagination and creativity finds form and is released. While he overemphasizes artists as a special class of people who engage in divine work, the cases suggest that the lines between artist and audience are often blurred in artistic play. Recall how Garden Angels and InterPlayers are not only artists, they are also audience to their own creations, and in the case of InterPlay, the performers are the art. The world created through artistic play, and specifically mystical adventure, is far more personal than Wolterstorff assumes.

Art does not simply involve a message being communicated from artist to audience or the artist's state of consciousness transmitted to the audience as Woltertorff suggests. Mystical adventure allows for missing experience to be expressed, agency to be gained, and resistance to be applied to the real world—all of which is grounded in the needs, longings, and context of the artistic players themselves. Artistic play is art in action.

All of this discussion suggests how imagination and creativity in artistic play allow humans to seek the God of the Unexpected. Ultimately, when imagination and human creativity find form through mystical adventure people can participate in divine or serendipitous creativity. As the case studies revealed time and again, more was created through artistic play than anyone could have expected.

The Senses and Spiritual Knowing in Artistic Play

The human capacity to imagine and perceive with the senses allows people to

grasp the dream of a different world through artistic play. With the help of imagination, the senses recruit the body's participation in mystical adventure, not only making the experience real but attuning people to mystery. Making the connection between the senses, play, and spiritual knowing, Miller argues that *aisthēsis*, "the senses turned-on to the wonder of all being," is a mark of play (1973, 150). He writes, "*Aisthēsis* comes from the Greek verb *aisthanomai*, which is the past tense form of the verb *aisethesai*, which means 'to sense' or 'to know,' for the senses truly give knowledge. That the word is significant can be seen in its use by the ancient Greek translators of Hebrew Scriptures. Isaiah 40 9:26 reads: 'Then all flesh shall know (*aisthanomai*) that I am the Lord your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.' Seeing is knowing; it is revelation. Seeing is believing; believing, seeing" (Miller 1973, 139-140). According to Miller, this aesthetic knowing is spiritual knowing, emanating from a sense of awe and wonder at all things. He continues, "*Aisthēsis* is body-seeing, body-knowing: seeing with the whole body, with the wholeness of the body" (Miller 1973, 140). While Keene (1969) also argues for the relationship between play and wonder, as discussed earlier, Miller extends this claim by discussing how the senses are integrally involved.

Associating play with the sensual experience of wonder seems one-sided in light of the case studies. Don Saliers' work (2005) suggests that what inspires awe and wonder in life, for example beauty, is a breath away from what terrifies. He writes, "We live in a terrifying world, shot full of absence and the perishing of what is held dear. But this same world is filled with immensely beautiful and wondrous things. Side-by-side with despair and senseless loss lie the mystery and beauty of being" (Saliers 2005, 306). This dual sense of wonder and terror also characterizes mystical adventure, its tension

created by the real/not-real world of art feeling both safe and dangerous, with the God of the Unexpected manifesting in ways that cannot be predicted.

Like awe and wonder, the danger and terror of mystical adventure is also registered by the senses. The terrible suffering endured by Japanese American internees is made real in part by the sensual qualities of the *Pottery of Tears*, including its heft, gritty surface, and rough form. Oppression and death are also brought close in *Floating Saints*, as the ghostly martyrs populate the sanctuary, by their form, placement, and aesthetic milieu blurring the boundaries between the living and the dead, body and spirit. It is visual and kinesthetic senses at work here, giving access to visceral, ineffable feeling of death and resurrection brushing up against one another. The hope of mystical adventure—invited by the *Pottery of Tears*, *Floating Saints*, or the Issei Garden—is not to have a pleasant experience but to become aware of the community's history of pain and resiliency, which becomes a source of strength.[10]

Because sight and kinesthesia are two senses that are particularly important to the case studies, I want to reflect on how these senses, separately and together, help people to attune themselves mystery. Recall the discussion about the practice of SEEING in the Issei Garden, which involves entering into the presence of the trees with contemplative imagination, allowing an I-Thou relationship to form. Similarly, Mom's art encourages members of the congregation to SEE the art objects. Instead of allowing itself to be taken for granted, the *Pottery of Tears* engages church members in active, in-the-moment SEEING. By being asked, "What is it?," the congregation is enticed to look more closely, more intently, with wide-eyed wonder so that a "cognitive crucifixion" can take place [Keene], as old images of what communion ware should look like fall away, and an

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[10] I am indebted to Don Saliers for this insight.

I-Thou relationship can form. *Floating Saints* also asks members of the congregation to enter into relationship—this time with the *yukata*, by SEEING them not simply as garments but as martyrs with an eerie presence, with demands to make on the living, and with a story to remember. SEEING opens up the possibility of encounter with mystery by paying attention to what wants to be made "external and visible," as Soelle says earlier (2001, 13).

The intimate, relational way of SEEING explored in these examples distinguishes artistic play as spiritual practice from the traditional way art is seen. As discussed earlier, Berleant criticizes traditional, modern aesthetics for its disinterested approach to art, which he traces to Greek philosophy. In classic thought, sight (as opposed to direct contact, for example) allows a person to distance him/herself from the art, thereby preserving the aloofness of the meditative spirit (Berleant 2004, 75). In Sallie McFague's analysis, the disinterested eye is an "arrogant eye," a term she borrows from feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye. The arrogant eye sees and organizes everything in relation to itself, simplifying for the sake of control and denying what it cannot understand, namely complexity and mystery (McFague 1997, 33).

In contrast to a disinterested, objectifying way of seeing, SEEING Mom's art or the Issei Garden involves developing relationships with artifacts that are more like the way people relate with people. I have discussed this phenomena in connection with the Issei Garden, where the Garden Angels SEE the trees more as people than mere objects, but it is true of Mom's art as well. As I have said, church members also SEE the yukata as life-like visitors from their history and ancestral land. And while it may be less obvious how the *Pottery of Tears* could be experienced as a person, members of the

congregation evince a growing personal relationship with the *Pottery of Tears*, which is built up through presence and usage. Recall church members' sense of kinship with the *Pottery of Tears*—that it is special because it belongs to the community, reflective of the church and community's story. In other words, it belongs to the community and the community belongs to it.

According to Pattison, most Christians do not take relationships with artifacts seriously for a number of reasons. Summarizing them he writes, "These include a general disapproval of possessions, anxiety about the idolatrous possession of objects, disparagement and fear of the fruits of human technology, generalization of religion so the material is excluded, the emphasis in Christianity upon human salvation, and a very generalized, non-specific concern for creation which largely ignores the work of human hands" (Pattison 2007*,* 239-43). SEEING allows people to attune to divine mystery as it inheres in artifacts. Pattison argues, "If we really are to see the glory of God through human beings, fully alive, then we need to have a different vision and perception of the artifacts that humans create and which partly constitute their identity" (2007*,* 258).

While visual art is central to artistic play at SJUMC, SEEING also allows InterPlayers to grasp spiritual truth since witnessing and mirroring are forms of SEEING. Just as in Winnicott's theory, where the mother must truly SEE the baby in order for her to engage in mirroring and for the infant to feel SEEN, InterPlayers practice witnessing as a means of SEEING and affirming people as they are, reflected in what they create. Witnessing also involves SEEING with a "loving eye" as McFague says. Like SEEING in mirroring, SEEING with a loving eye involves a subject-subject experience, in which the seer respects the other as subject. In her analysis, the way a nursing mother locks

eyes with her baby's eyes is the ultimate form of humans SEEING one another (McFague 1997*,* 35). McFague's take on the loving eye is similar to Franck's notion of SEEING to grasp the essence of what is seen on its own terms.[11] She writes, "The loving eye…acknowledges complexity, mystery, and difference. It recognizes that boundaries exist between the self and the other, that the interests of other persons (and the natural world) are not identical with one's own, that knowing the other takes time and attention" (McFague 1997*,* 34).

McFague aptly describes what InterPlayers are taught to do in witnessing—notice and appreciate (loving eye), rather than evaluate and critique the performance for the sake of entertainment or for the sake of art (arrogant eye). In light of McFague, SEEING with a loving eye gives access to the kind of embodied, spiritual knowing experienced in InterPlay. She argues, "It [seeing with a loving eye] means that the route to knowledge is slow, open, full of surprises, interactive and reciprocal, as well as attentive to detail and difference. And it will be embodied. The disembodied, distant, transcendent, simplifying, objectifying, quick and easy arrogant eye becomes the embodied, lowly, immanent, complexifying, subjectifying, proximate, and 'make-do' loving eye. The pure mind's eye becomes the messy body's eye, and those lowly senses (the so-called female ones of taste, touch, and smell) are allowed back into the knowledge game" (McFague 1997, 34-5). Interestingly, McFague is aware of the possible emergence of the unexpected in SEEING with a loving eye. Without this kind of intimate SEEING, which requires one to be fully present, the truth of what is being created in the moment might not be apparent. One is likely to miss the God of the Unexpected.

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[11] Both McFague and Franck reference Martin Buber's I-Thou model of relationship in discussing this subject-subject way of seeing.

Witnessing not only involves sight but kinesthesia. In the case of InterPlay, bodies of performers not only project images, the images are perceived by an embodied audience, not just with the eyes but all the senses. Along the same lines, Pattison argues, "An image is a complex of all the sense impressions that a multi-sensory, embodied perceiver receives and as they engage with the carnal memory. Images and representations within human minds are thus multi-sensorially composed and affected, dwelling as much in bodily senses and memories as in the mind" (Pattison 2007*,* 75).[12] It is clear that the image, for example of Elizabeth climbing a mountain, is grasped not only visually but viscerally as the audience—"sees with the whole body," as Miller says above (1973*,* 140).

Because performance art is the basis for InterPlay, kinesthesia is a vital sense in the practice, especially for sensing the mystery of God as it manifests in and through the body. Earlier I discussed how InterPlayers practice improvisation as a means of accessing the wisdom of the body, which is a source of mystery. Recall how InterPlayers' images of God are largely kinesthetic, rooted in bodily experiences of artistic play. An important tenet of the practice is what Phil and Cynthia call the "physicality of grace," which suggests that grace (the opposite of stress, according to InterPlay) is experienced in the body. A refreshing alternative to traditional Christian notions of grace and mystery as strictly spiritual, esoteric, and otherworldly, having more grace in life is as simple as listening to music, dancing, gardening, or doing InterPlay. Cynthia defines the physicality of grace as "a set of physical experiences describing the satisfying and enlivening state of being calm, centered, energized, alert, relaxed, etc."

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[12] The author cites Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 73.

(Winton Henry 2004*,* 18). Cultivating grace in life (for oneself and others) is considered as a spiritual practice in InterPlay.

Interestingly, the spiritual knowing gained from practicing the physicality of grace appears to counter what I would call the physicality of being held captive by a pattern that limits thinking, feeling, or doing. The most common metaphors for describing such captivity are embodied: in a rut, in a jam, between a rock and a hard place, blocked, no way out, trapped, boxed in, gridlock, swamped, etc. All of these images express the physical stress of being held in place by a mental, emotional, spiritual or physical pattern. Teaching the physicality of grace, InterPlay allows people to learn in their bodies an alternative state of being that is free, creative, and full of ease—a spiritual knowing that is experienced and realized kinesthetically. This is not to say that teaching grace in the body only prepares people for experiencing a sense of ease and flourishing. Teaching the physicality of grace also helps InterPlayers to "dance life's difficult dances," as Cynthia says, to meet life's darkest moments with powerful ease, recognizing that "we can have a profound, creative, physical relationship to any circumstance" including death, aging, or the loss of a child (Winton-Henry 2004, 203). Learning the grace of the body releases the capacity not only to sense life's terrors (to borrow a phrase from Don Saliers) but not to flee from them.[13] Instead, InterPlayers respond as they have practiced: with breath, singing, dancing and play.

While "bodywisdom" is an explicit part of InterPlay, kinesthesia is also important to artistic play at SJUMC. Earlier I discussed how Mom engages the congregation in "Pretending to Be" through *Floating Saints*, and in the Issei Garden where she teaches pruning with a try-it-and-see approach. These play forms engage the

[13] Again, I am grateful to Don Saliers for this insight.

kinesthetic sense of the artistic player. As the data revealed, *Floating Saints* allows some members of the congregation to relate to the *yukata* as bodies, as the garments themselves evoke body memory. In the Issei Garden, pruning the trees is an embodied, spiritual practice whose internal goods can only be experienced in the doing of it. Furthermore, in the at-onement with the trees, the Garden Angels learn to feel the "body" of the tree, which the most skilled among them can do, sensing how the tree wants to grow. This is not simply a task performed by the eyes, but a fuller bodied knowing, more the way an InterPlay audience tunes into the body of a fellow performer, sensing the energy and emotions of the performer's body.

The central role of the senses in artistic play suggests that imagining alone does not contribute to the transformative power of mystical adventure. Instead, it is the creative, dynamic interaction of imagination and the senses that challenges limiting patterns and deepens spiritual knowing. Freedom from habitual patterns that limit thinking, feeling or doing is not simply a matter of evoking one's capacity to seeing a different world, but also exploring it by feel and other senses. In other words, constructing new, liberative knowledge through artistic play involves not only cognitive change, which is traditionally linked with sight, but an altered, whole-bodied being-in-the-world.

My conclusions about the holistic, mind-body-spiritual knowing that comes from mystical adventure resonate with an argument Patrick Slattery makes for the way art transforms through "synthetical moments," borrowing a term from William Pinar and Madeline Grumet. Slattery writes, "In the synthesizing moment there is a reconstruction of the self and an experience of solidarity of the intellect, the body, the spirit, and the

cosmos as well as an intrinsic experience of time, place and meaning" (1995, 208). Interested in post-modern curriculum, he does not make his case using categories such as imagination or God, but he uses humanist language to refer to what Phil has called a "God-moment" or what I have been calling "mystical adventure." He describes his own experience with Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* to illustrate a synthethical moment as a "border crossing," a disturbing, seminal moment that launched him into a lifelong exploration of contemporary art and postmodern living (Slattery 1995, 214-5). Drawing a conclusion similar to mine, Slattery writes, "Knowledge is not logically ordered and waiting to be discovered, rather it is constructed in experiences of the whole body and being" (Slattery 1995, 214).

Taking seriously artistic, intuitive and non-rational ways of knowing runs counter to much educational theory and culture in America. Slattery advocates for art to be included in the postmodern curriculum because "[p]articipation in aesthetic environments provides the educational community with alternative strategies for living and expanded possibilities for the future" (Slattery 1995, 224). I am making a similar case for artistic play in relation to religious education.

I have presented the role of practicing stories, imagination and creativity, and the senses in setting the stage for mystical adventure. I now explore how local practical theological aesthetics, which are broader than any of these three, also allow humans to seek the God of the Unexpected.

Local Practical Theological Aesthetics

My notion of local practical theological aesthetics (LPTA) has three sources of inspiration. First is the work of Daniël Louw, who calls for "practical theological aesthetics," which recognize that aesthetic reasoning is implicitly involved in the methods of practical theology (2001, 93). He writes that practical theological aesthetics enable a person to think in terms of metaphors and images, stimulate the imagination to come up with possibilities and images that give meaning to life, and create a world that can lead to the rediscovery of everyday experience (Louw 2001, 99).[14] Louw's description of aesthetic reasoning connects with Howard Gardner's notion of artistic intelligence, but applied to theological construction. Earlier I called attention to how Mom's art, the Issei Garden, and InterPlay stimulated people's artistic intelligence, but Louw's work helps me to consider that they were also engaging in aesthetic reasoning, as the art provoked people to think in terms of metaphors and images for the sake of theological construction.

In Louw's analysis, practical theological aesthetics must assist in reframing existing God-images, presenting metaphors that not only provide new ways of conversing about God but correspond with contextual issues that speak to the human quest for meaning (2001, 99). In other words, he writes, "[i]n practical theological aesthetics, imagination should therefore toy with new images which can portray God in terms of contextuality" (Louw 2001, 99). Having explored how people at SJUMC and InterPlay "toy with" alternative God images through art, I believe Louw's insight about playing with God-images is critical. While I mostly agree with his description of practical

[14] Louw cites J.J. Degenaar's 1993 article, "Art and Culture in a Changing South Africa" in *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif Vir Wysbegeerte* 12-3.

theological aesthetics, I add the word *local* to emphasize that practical theological aesthetics (and the theology constructed in relation to them) are shaped by context.

Here my thinking about LPTA is influenced by Robert Schreiter, who argues that local theology reflects a shift from thinking about theology in comprehensive or systematic terms to theology that takes seriously context, history, and how meaning is produced in response to these (1985, 3-4). Though he does not address theological aesthetics, Schreiter's insight is important for artistic play. For example, he discusses an "ethnographic local theology with a contextual approach," a type of theology that attempts to answer questions of cultural identity and often becomes evident in the reassertion of an identity and dignity that a community has been denied (1985, 13). Given the history of Japanese American internment and the current identity crisis experienced at SJUMC, Schreiter's description sheds light on the local theology that people are constructing though the *Pottery of Tears*, *Floating Saints*, and the Issei Garden. Though Scherieter's work addresses Christian contexts only, his notion of local theology is relevant for InterPlay, a nonreligious community. The construction of meaning in InterPlay is also shaped by local concerns, history, and culture. Recall how the social and cultural milieu of the bay area has been the fertile soil for InterPlay's growth and development.

My thinking about LPTA is also shaped by Frank Burch Brown, who argues that revelation is partly mediated through an aesthetic consistent with a tradition's history and theology, which reinforces that theological aesthetics and context are intimately related. For example, at spirit-filled African American churches, the aesthetic of worship involves singing, uninhibited improvisation in preaching, and spontaneous responses from the

congregation. According to Burch Brown, this aesthetic freedom is consistent with their yearning for spiritual freedom, characterized by the moving of the Spirit. As he puts it, the God celebrated here is "the One who liberates and saves, delivering Daniel from the fiery furnace, Israel from Egypt's land, and prayer and praise from the shackles of rigid propriety" (Burch Brown 1989, 127). Aesthetics in these churches must speak to and re-affirm an African American Christian sense of history and identity. For racial/ethnic minority churches whose sense of culture has been threatened, suppressed, or forgotten; cultivating and claiming their aesthetic could be vital ways of exploring what it means, for example, to be African American (or Japanese American) and Christian. While Burch Brown's work has obvious relevance for understanding artistic play at SJUMC, it is also important to InterPlay, where aesthetics consistent with the context also mediate experience of mystery.

SJUMC and InterPlay have unique LPTA, a contrast made clear given how differently each community practices stories and contributes to their own storied epistemology. At the Japanese church, the LPTA are characterized by the telling of stories and the building of communal memory through visual art, with contemplation as an important component. Through artistic play, both Mom and the Garden Angels are creating a visual culture in the sanctuary and on the grounds of the church, which is both expressive of and contributes to LPTA. Non-verbal, visual, contemplative aesthetics resonate with the Japanese American culture and spirituality, with its roots in Buddhism, Confucianism, and other Japanese religions. In contrast, the LPTA of InterPlay are largely verbal, kinesthetic, and creative, which is appropriate to a community of "body intellectuals," dedicated to action-research in "bodywisdom" through the process of

making art. InterPlay involves the aesthetics of performing stories both as individuals and as a community, playing with and fine tuning the expressiveness of the body.[15] The felt images of freedom, healing, and wholeness are part of InterPlay's LPTA, as well as the verbal images contained in InterPlay language, including "sneaky deep," and "easy focus."

As Louw argues, through the use of metaphors and images, practical theological aesthetics allow people to create a world that can lead to the rediscovery of everyday experience (2001, 99). In the case of artistic play, the art, which is rooted in LPTA, creates a world of mystical adventure for people to explore. As discussed earlier, this storied world of art offers new metaphors and images (including God-images) that help people to experience life differently, possibly freeing them from patterns that limit thinking, feeling, or doing.

The God-images that people construct through artistic play are partly shaped by LPTA, since aesthetic experience informs what is imaged. For example, Japanese aesthetics play a role in shaping what people see in the *yukata* crucifx. Likewise the aesthetics of InterPlay, which are largely kinesthetic, assist in generating kinesthetic images of God. In both cases, LPTA mediate people's aesthetic reasoning about who or what God is. While some theologians tend to focus on verbal, biblical metaphors for God, the case studies suggest a broader range of God-images that include visual and embodied metaphors for God that come from everyday life, for example, CHRIST/SPIRIT IS YUKATA and GOD IS THE INTERPLAY FLOOR. The referents

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[15] The contrast between the LPTA of the case studies is not as stark as it seems. For instance, despite their comfort with language and discussion, InterPlayers also practice silent contemplation of their own or other people's performance. Likewise, while LPTA of the Japanese church might lean toward contemplation, creating is important. Mom's art is highly creative, as is the pruning work of the Garden Angels.

come from the culture or life-world of each community, creating a never-before-seen God-image that feels right in that context.

While artistic play allows for endless possibilities for constructing God-images appropriate to LPTA, this project's examples suggest that LPTA allow people to engage in aesthetic reasoning not limited to constructing God-images. Artistic play for the Garden Angels may involve an encounter with God as Holy Other in the garden, but the practice is often about exploring, constructing, and performing cultural identity in this territory of play. Similarly, much of InterPlay is not about God-images, but creating a self and a life-world. In both cases, aesthetic reasoning is involved in that people are creating, discovering and toying with images that lead to the rediscovery of everyday experience.

While the images and metaphors that people construct through artistic play are partly shaped by LPTA, theological aesthetics are not necessarily given or inherited. Burch Brown argues that revelation is partly mediated through an aesthetic consistent with a community's tradition [I would say habitus], including its history and theology, however they are not pre-existing as Burch Brown seems to assume—rather they are constructed, contested, and negotiated by each local community and generation. In the case of SJUMC, the church has inherited European aesthetics in its liturgy, yet the LPTA to which Mom's art contributes challenge what has been taken for granted. One could make a similar argument about the Issei Garden, which pushes back against European aesthetic notions of what is appropriate landscaping for a Christian church. In the case of SJUMC, theological aesthetics are being re-negotiated to be more local and culturally relevant.

In contrast, the LPTA of InterPlay were neither given nor passed down from any tradition since the community was founded by two individuals. Instead, the LPTA were constructed by the community itself, shaped by the demographics, interests, and context of the founders and early participants of InterPlay. The LPTA of InterPlay also stand against the aesthetics of a disembodied mainstream culture, a disinterested approach to art, and religious traditions that fail to embrace the full expressiveness of art and the human body. Earlier I argued that this project's examples show how artistic play can be a form of resistance, but I want to be more specific now: Artistic play (at least in these cases) is rooted in LPTA that are themselves critical and resistive.

LPTA at SJUMC and InterPlay are evolving through artistic play. In the case of SJUMC, Mom's art and the Garden Angels are redefining and expanding their LPTA, according to their cultural identity, creativity, and imagination. It is allowing them to deepen their sense of history, memory, and culture—building by feel even that which has not existed. Likewise, the LPTA of InterPlay are slowly being refined and is changing as more communities adapt the practice. The founders ask InterPlay communities to conform to their philosophy, forms, and teaching of the practice 80 percent of the time, which means that 20 percent of the time people are free to play with what has been traditionally taught according to their particular needs and creative energies. As more people around the world practice InterPlay, local concerns and theological notions will change, therefore LPTA are bound to vary to some degree between InterPlay communities. In time, the local concerns of SJUMC are likely to change, especially as the church becomes more multicultural, which will alter its LPTA and consequently the artistic play of the community. While Mom's art and the Issei Garden provide timely,

relevant opportunities for artistic play for the moment, they may not in the future. Artistic play is highly context and time-sensitive.

These communities are developing LPTA as an expressive, embodied "grammar." In a given community, various forms of artistic play follow the "rules" of this grammar, though artistic players might also test, elaborate, or change these rules over time. LPTA are the grammar by which people in a community sneak up on God—sensible ways that are steeped in local context, habits of being and ways of knowing. While LPTA reveal how artistic play allows humans to sneak up on God, LPTA also provide clues as to how God is likely to sneak up on people. It makes sense that revelatory moments in artistic play happen according to the grammar of LPTA. Why would God speak to a community of people in a language they do not understand? The way that divine mystery is revealed at SJUMC may only be grasped by members of that community, and the same could be said of InterPlay because LPTA are unique to each.[16]

People learn the grammar of LPTA through artistic play, which schools the imagination and the senses for mystical adventure according to LPTA. Providing insight on art as pedagogy, Masao Takenaka argues that Asian visual art requires a "listening" approach that ushers in a different kind of knowing appropriate to Asia. Quoting the *nanga* (black and white painting) artist Beiu Iizuka, he says, "While Western painting stresses color and shape, Eastern painting emphasizes the voice. When we see the waterfall we listen to the sound of the waterfall. When we see the birds we listen to singing of the birds. We see a flower we listen to the song of the flower" (Takenaka

[16] Of course, revelation is also a personal experience and much could be said about personal practical theological aesthetics. However, the focus of this study is communal artistic play rather than individual.

1986, 30).[17] Applying this to theology, Takenaka argues that listening to art trains people for perceiving what cannot be grasped through rational thought, including the mystery of God. For example, in teaching about the kingdom of God, Jesus says "the wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it" (John 3:8). As Takenaka points out, "The sound of the wind does not have color or shape and cannot be painted by rational technique. It must be grasped by the heart which throbs to the echo it brings" (1986, 30). All of the examples discussed in the last section reveal how the imagination and the senses have been schooled through artistic play, not by rational technique, but through the particular, visceral ways that LPTA ring true in the bodymind.

Don Saliers' work sheds light on how liturgy, which I would argue is always embedded in LPTA, schools emotions and the senses for spiritual knowing. Within ritual, writes Saliers, people learn how to practice the "intelligence of emotions," which allows people to see the world below its surface. Ritual allows people to rehearse critical capacities to cope with life's extremes of beauty and terror, not being swept away by mere feeling (Saliers 2005, 304). Saliers points to liturgy's capacity to cultivate a kind of attentiveness through the body, not allowing people to shrink from life's mysteries. Referencing Simone Weil, for example, he discusses how attentiveness to natural beauty, even in the midst of affliction, cultivates longing for beauty in the world (Saliers 2005, 304). This schooling of the emotions and the senses shifts embodied patterns of thinking, feeling, and doing. The kind of liturgical formation that Saliers refers to is powerful precisely because the grammar of LPTA speak to body, mind, heart, and spirit.

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[17] The author does not provide a reference for Iizuka's quote.

Conclusion

This project represents a long journey from the scholarly height of theology of play of the 1970s, when there was growing recognition of the theological importance and ubiquity of play. With the field of practical theology then in its infancy, movement toward developing a practical theology of play was yet to come. In the meantime, individuals and communities have continued to engage in art and play as spiritual practice. Despite the lack of scholarly attention, artistic play is well established and widely practiced. I could not have chosen two more diverse communities practicing artistic play if this were not so. Much work is yet to be done to fully understand artistic play as a spiritual practice, with practical theologians only beginning to take interest in aesthetics, with religious educators overlooking art and play for adults, and with most scholars in theological aesthetics lacking interest in practical art that everyday people create as they make sense of life.

Artistic play points to the need for a more expanded notion of *poiēsis* than has been traditionally discussed in practical theology. The "making" process of artistic play is not simply the creative skill of throwing pottery or painting a portrait, rather what is made through artistic play (and how) is far more complex. The case studies reveal the capacity of people to engage in mystical adventure, using stories, space, the imagination, creativity and the senses to construct and experience a world of "as if" for the sake of feeling toward the spiritual knowing for which they hunger. Examining how imagination and creativity take form and are released through mystical adventure makes it easier to grasp how people explore ultimate questions such as "Who am I?" and "Who or what is God?" In light of object relations theory and performance theory, these examples suggest

that how people construct meaning through artistic play is surprisingly similar, despite differences in local culture, aesthetics, and theology.

How people in these case studies are transformed by artistic play is strikingly common. As discussed, the mystical adventure experienced by artistic players challenges limiting patterns, builds storied epistemologies, and gives access to missing experience and to mystery through everyday forms. Through artistic play, the communities I have discussed are playing toward freedom, agency, and resistance—not in a straight, bee-line of progress, but in the back-and-forth of play that never leaves the player exactly the same.

Seeking the God of the Unexpected through artistic play is more enterprising and quotidian than traditional images of revelation and mysticism. In fact, it suggests a significant divine/human partnership in spiritual formation that refuses to be bound by church tradition. While encounters with God remain a prerogative of the Unexpected, these cases suggest that people find creative, effective, artistic ways to set the stage for mystical adventure. What is surprising is not that people seek God through artistic play or that divine mystery is revealed through it. Religious and spiritual people practice infinite paths to God, many of which involve the body, art, and imagination. What startles me is how artistic play allows people to plumb profound, spiritual questions indirectly, seek missing experience of which they may be only dimly aware, and to inadvertently avoid some of the dead-end places to which traditional moral and religious practices can lead.

If religious education were to take it seriously, artistic play has the potential of becoming a significant method of inquiry, spiritual formation, and perhaps even ethical

action throughout the lifespan. My recommendation is that artistic play not be developed first and foremost for institutional academic classroom use when it is already established in many communities. Communities such as SJUMC and InterPlay have practical wisdom about artistic play, and its power comes from the local theology and aesthetics of the community. It would be fruitful to train community leaders, such as pastors, to develop LPTA and artistic play that would allow imagination and creativity to find form and be released in ways appropriate to their community.

Developing the LPTA of a community is strengthening its literacy in the aesthetic grammar of the community so it can support artistic play and address a wide range of theological questions through the practice. In some communities the LPTA and appropriate forms of artistic play may be clear or pre-existing, while in others the community may need to explore multiple forms to identify which ones resonate with people. Working collaboratively, artists and religious educators could develop LPTA and artistic play in the community for spiritual transformation. The case studies indicate that religious education that takes seriously LPTA and artistic play trains people, not explicitly in right belief (in terms of theology or doctrine) or action (in terms of ethics) but in cultivating sensual openness and attentiveness to spiritual knowing. As the data suggest, communities new to artistic play will need to develop their own means of engaging the imagination, making space for artistic play, and structuring as much of a life-world as possible that supports artistic play, all of which takes time. Mom's art, the cultivation of the Issei Garden, and InterPlay have taken decades to mature.

Artistic play is likely to be a challenge for many pastors, especially those trained in hyper-cognitive approaches to theology and worship. Recently, a small group of

clergy women in the San Francisco bay area has received a significant two-year grant to engage in artistic play (using this project as its premise) for the sake of cultivating pastoral excellence. Overworked and constantly stretched to their limits, artistic play does not come naturally for everyone in the group. They began the process with some anxiety, saying, "Entering artistic play will require us to try something that may make us look silly, to go outside our comfort zones, to look stupid, to cry with frustration, to be incompetent, and to be held up by God's grace" (Stager 2008). However, they agreed to commit to exploring artistic play because they grasped its potential. They write, "We are hoping that by intentionally embracing the mystery of God through play that we would know more of who God is and more of who we are. This growing knowledge feeds into our ministries. The challenge of play will provide insights that cannot be attained though the existing leadership models we have encountered" (Stager 2008). While training pastors in artistic play is a worthy goal, it need not be the only aim. This project's case studies suggest that lay people can be highly effective in developing LPTA and forms of artistic play. In fact, lay people may be less encumbered than clergy, less bound by church tradition and expectations that can hinder artistic play.

As for these case studies, the future is open. InterPlay will continue to expand, spreading its form of artistic play throughout the United States and around the world. How the LPTA of InterPlay communities will evolve is yet to be seen, though I am confident InterPlay will continue in whatever form even a generation after the founders of InterPlay. The InterPlay life-world that they have developed is complex, robust, and flexible enough to ensure its longevity. As for artistic play at SJUMC, I am uncertain what form artistic play will take (if at all) once Mom and the original Garden Angels are

gone. Who will continue to develop LPTA at the church and new forms of artistic play is yet to be determined.

Beyond these two case studies, other communities that practice artistic play (both past and present) are waiting to be researched. In addition, there are many communities that could be transformed by learning how to engage in artistic play as a spiritual practice. What is at stake is worthy of consideration. The case studies suggest that communities that practice artistic play are playing toward local, storied, embodied spiritual knowledge that has been missing in most of academia and in a large portion of "standard" church life. They represent countless artistic perspectives and imaginative, sensual experiences of the God of the Unexpected that have yet to be accounted for in ways that would profoundly challenge and extend religious education and practical theology.

Chapter 7
Epilogue

After the research and writing phases of this dissertation, several important developments unfolded at the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC). In the dissertation, I approached Mom's art in the sanctuary and SEEING in the Issei Memorial Garden as practices located in distinct, isolated spheres. I concluded that play with the hybridity of Japanese American spirituality was more possible in the garden because it was outside the bounds of the sanctuary, which is dominated by Christian tradition. However, evidence of a blurring of the lines between sanctuary and garden has emerged.

In September and October 2009, Mom created a four-Sunday *Garden Series* that engaged the congregation in creating a garden (made from wood, fabric, and paper) inside the sanctuary during worship. She designed the series in collaboration with the new pastor, Rev. Motoe Yamada, to help move the congregation forward from a recent conflict. The focal point of the installation was a life-sized tree, which Mom "planted" in the front of the sanctuary. In the background, she mounted paper dolls on the wall, and she tacked cloth panels on the side walls to suggest trees. Every week the features of the sanctuary garden changed and "grew," creating the imagery of the changing seasons to coincide with the themes of communal growth and transformation.

On the first Sunday, the central tree was bare, the paper dolls were disjoined, and the side panels were brown to symbolize winter. Preaching about humanity's suffering, brokenness, and sin, Rev. Motoe reminded the congregation that God calls people to repent, to call for God's help, and to "turn around". Referencing the central tree, she

asked, “Is this tree dying or is it getting ready for spring?” (Sermon by Motoe Yamada [13 September 2009]) On the second Sunday, a few green leaves made from paper appeared on the bare branches of the center tree to represent spring. Green panels were added to the brown on the side walls. And the paper dolls appeared in pairs, holding hands. As part of her sermon, Rev. Motoe distributed paper leaves provided by Mom to members of the congregation. The pastor invited each person to write on a leaf an area in which he/she would like to grow. With the help of Mom and others, congregants attached their leaves to the central tree as the pastor preached. Rev. Motoe emphasized people’s participation in the growth of the tree as an act of commitment (Sermon by Motoe Yamada [20 September 2009]). Part of the service also included a testimony given by Ed Kubo, who told the story of why he became involved in revitalizing the garden. He had promised God that if he were cured of cancer he would devote himself to the beautification of the Issei Garden (Speech by Edwin Kubo [20 September 2009]).

On the third Sunday, representing summer/fall, the central tree was fully green with leaves. Red fabric panels were added to the growing “forest” on the sides of the sanctuary, which now moved from brown to green to red, looking from front to back. The paper dolls appeared in a circle holding hands. For this service, Rev. Motoe asked children to hang red origami “fruit” on the central tree made by Mom. The pastor preached about growing, nurturing, and sharing “fruit” as well as being rooted in good soil (Sermon by Motoe Yamada [27 September 2009]). One of the Garden Angels read a history of the Issei Garden, which was provided partly by me but further researched by “Uncle” Ed.

On the fourth Sunday, representing the completion of the garden, the central tree was in full bloom bearing both leaves and bright red fruit. The paper dolls and the fabric panels remained as they were the previous week, but live plants and a *bonsai* tree were added to the installation. On their own accord, Garden Angels contributed the live greenery to the installation, feeling that real plants were appropriate for this final Sunday of the series. Rev. Motoe preached about how they had witnessed the garden grow in the sanctuary, how the church members were part of the garden growing together, and how their life as a church started with the faithfulness of the *issei* pioneers. She emphasized building the future with their present actions, while remembering the past (Sermon by Motoe Yamada [4 October 2010]). Part of the service also included a testimony by Garden Angel Lincoln Fuji.

Through this garden series, new, significant, explicit links between faith and the Issei Garden were made, as the garden was literally re-created in the sanctuary. The installation began by building a “pretend” garden, but the faith testimonies of the Garden Angels were real, as were the live plants and *bonsai* tree brought in at the end. Over the course of the series, a playful blend of real and not/real was created through art, artifacts, and performance. On the wall, paper people were represented in the process of transformation, but real people were also enacting the transformation depicted by the art, as people embodied their commitment to change by working together to transform the central tree. Garden Angels, whose stories of faith had never been told in worship, were heard. Their public testimonies marked a departure from their past performances as Japanese American men who tended to show their faith by working in the garden rather than by talking.

The Garden Series is a clear, compelling example of SJUMC using local practical theological aesthetics. When conflict gripped the church, a strong sense of the congregation's aesthetics was an advantage, representing a pre-existing resource. This sense of LPTA had already been established through church's historic interest in culture and the arts, through Mom's art, and through the work of the Garden Angels. Therefore, when the church was embroiled in conflict, the new pastor was able to call upon the congregation's sense of aesthetics to construct theology in response to the conflict. Evoking the imagery, language, and aesthetics of the Issei Garden, the installation harnessed the power of this symbol to help the church move forward from conflict. Building the pretend garden was a re-enactment of constructing the real garden, signaling this moment as a pivotal time to move forward by linking it with the building of the Issei Garden nearly forty years ago, which was a turning point in the church's history. The installation incorporated the voices, presence, and stories of the Garden Angels, some of whom helped build the Issei Garden and who serve as living reminders of their forbearers.

Further ethnographic research at SJUMC must be conducted to determine what the *Garden Series* created and what effect, if any, the installation had in helping the congregation recover from conflict. I would like to investigate what effect participation in the art had on people. In comparison to her other liturgical art, Mom's *Garden Series* engaged people in more active doing/learning then ever before. What people discovered as a result of the art has yet to be uncovered.

In addition, in December 2009 Ed Kubo and other Garden Angels, including *sansei* Rick Kimura, installed a waterfall and river in the Issei Garden. What was a dry

river bed is filled with running water. According to "Uncle" Ed, many church members had requested a water feature be added to the garden. He objected on practical grounds because a fountain is more difficult to maintain than a dry river bed in the long term. However, "Uncle" Ed deferred to the congregation's wishes, acknowledging that the garden does not belong to him but to the entire church. In that spirit, he began accepting donations for the fountain from all church members, preferring small amounts from many people rather than accepting large donations from a few. His objective was to promote a sense of ownership of the fountain by as many church members as possible as they invested in it and felt part of a communal effort to beautify the garden (Field notes, 30 December 2009).

Fundraising widely could have contributed to the healing process of the church, as people affirmed the church's historic legacy represented by the garden while investing its future through its aesthetic improvement. According to Rick, who installed the fountain, the new water feature represents this generation's contribution to the garden, which suggests that the church is reinterpreting and reclaiming anew the garden as a symbol. He hoped that the fountain would help to signal a new and growing vitality at the church (Field notes, 30 December 2009).

In the construction and dedication of the new fountain, there was a sense of the passing on of a legacy. According to "Uncle" Ed, the installation of the fountain marked handing over leadership to younger Garden Angels. Though he promised to continue teaching and mentoring, he intends to turn over his leadership while he is still young and well enough to teach. "Uncle" Ed felt glad that some young people in the church participated in the construction phase of the fountain, washing rocks by the bucket so that

the river would run clear. "That's the way it should be," he said, meaning the whole church should be involved (Field notes, 30 December 2009). There was similar sense of passing on a legacy during the dedication service for the fountain, when Rev. Motoe paired Garden Angels with children. She asked the children to hold their hands with palms facing up, symbolizing a willingness to receive. Then she asked the Garden Angels to cover the children's hands with their own, palms down, in a gesture of giving the garden over to the children. I suspect that the passing on of the church's legacy from one generation to the next had never been made as explicit (Field notes, 3 January 2010).

On the third of January 2010, the day of the fountain's dedication, Rick Kimura was baptized in the Issei Garden, using water from the new fountain. In many ways, it was appropriate that the first person to be baptized in the Issei Garden was a *sansei* church member, who donated his time as a professional landscaper to build the fountain. It not only symbolized a younger generation investing in the legacy of those that had gone before, it was if they were blessing the *sansei* and all those that would follow with the new water of faith. In an unexpected turn of events, the garden had become an outdoor sanctuary, blurring the lines between sanctuary and garden. Having water in the garden resonates with the Japanese spiritual heritage of the garden, yet it is also a new, Christian symbol, that makes the garden not just a cultural space but an explicitly sacred place.

Additional research will reveal how the Issei Garden has evolved as a symbol of the church since the dissertation and what this new development has created in the mind, hearts, spirits, and bodies of the church members. As people talked about the garden, I detected a shift in people's language in describing it. I heard more theological language

than ever before and greater awareness of the connections between past, present, and future. Perhaps most prominent was Rev. Motoe referring to SJUMC as the "Garden Church," a public image that is new for the church and a term that appears to reconcile faith and culture. More research is needed to determine whether this new nickname helps to mediate the controversy over keeping the word *Japanese* in the church's name. In a sense, the nickname *Garden Church* shows respect for the cultural heritage of the church by referencing the Issei Garden without excluding any ethnic group.

The timing of the Garden Series and the installation of the new fountain in the Issei Garden are significant. More fieldwork will uncover the complex relationship between these two spheres. My hypothesis is that both the sanctuary and the garden are allowing for new forms of reconciliation between faith and culture. In the Garden Series, the writing of intentions on paper leaves and attaching them to a pretend tree is reminiscent of Japanese spiritual practices. In Japanese Buddhist tradition, people write prayers on wood tablets and hang them at the temple, and in Shinto tradition, people tie bad luck fortunes on racks or on the branches of trees. In a sense, the Garden Series distantly mimics and plays with these traditional practices yet in Christian form. In the case of the Issei Garden, a Christian sacrament has been introduced to a territory of play that has allowed people to practice meditation, which has put them in touch with their Buddhist spiritual roots. In both cases, Buddhist and Christian identities as well as Japanese and American cultures are being playfully mingled and expressed. All of this has important implications for understanding how a religious community uses aesthetics *in situ* for the construction of meaning.

Appendix

A - Naomi Takahashi Goto

Photo by and courtesy of
Steven Gelberg

B - Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church (SJUMC) California

C - What is it?

D - A set of chopsticks rests, each shaped like a fox

E - Talking orange – What does it say?

F - What is it?

G - The *Pottery of Tears* by Anthony Maki Gill, commissioned by Leo and Naomi Goto

H - *Floating Saints*
by Naomi
Takahashi Goto

H - *Floating Saints* by Naomi Takahashi Goto

I - Courtney Goto (right) with her cousin

J - View of the Issei Memorial Garden from inside the narthex of SJUMC

J - View of the Issei Memorial Garden at SJUMC

J - View of the Issei Memorial Garden at SJUMC

K - Mom (Naomi Takahashi Goto) at play

L – Kent and Kathi Nakashima (1977)

Photo courtesy of Harris Studio

Photo courtesy of Jonathan Sakakibara

M - Issei in the Issei Garden at SJUMC (circa 1973 or 74)

N - A new sign

O - Past and future side-by-side

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