



# RIVER CROSSING

*playback theatre*

## Tools Beyond Talk

**Embodied Storytelling as Community-Based Healing**

With Chris Fitz, Cintra Harbold and

[River Crossing Playback Theatre](#)

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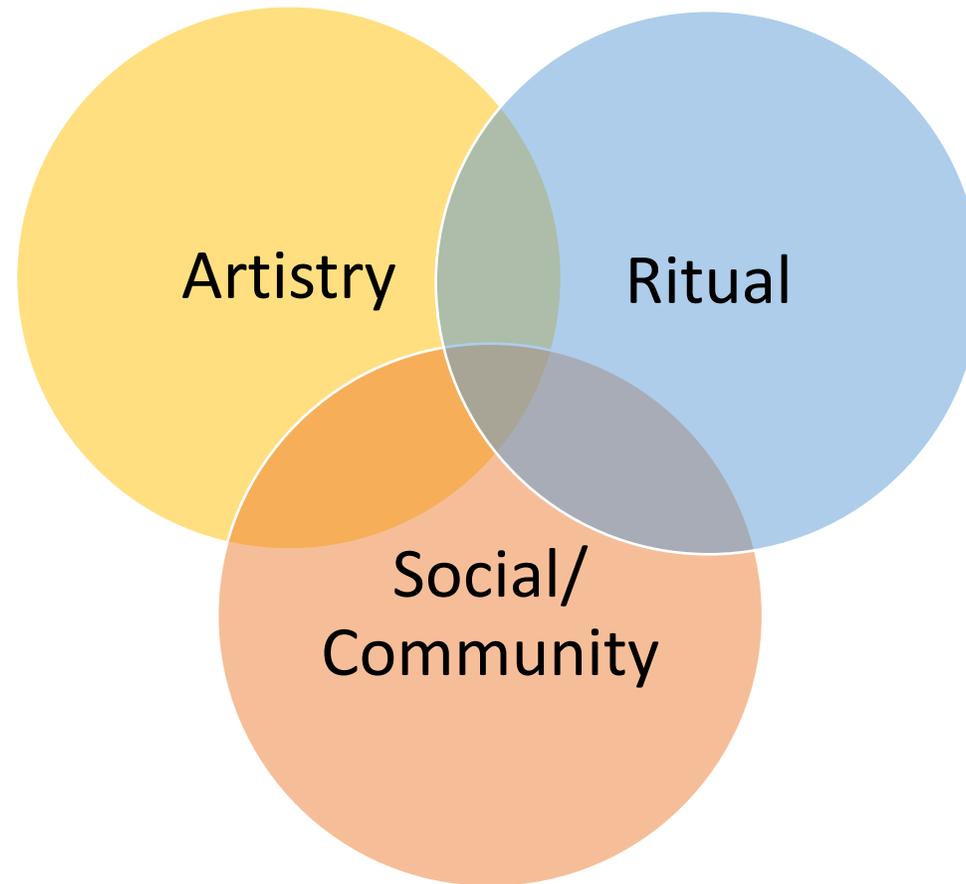
## The Essential Playback Theatre form

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- Ritual Opening
- Introduction and Invitation to Be Part
  - Story told
  - Conductor passes to actors with “Let’s Watch”
  - Stillness
  - **Actors embody – sound & motion (or story)**
  - Stillness
  - Acknowledge the Teller
  - Teller’s last words
- Common Reflection
- Closing



# Essence of Playback Theatre



# Playback Theatre and its Cousins

- **Artistry** – unique concern for aesthetic quality
  - *Psychodrama, Sociodrama* and *Theatre of the Oppressed* aim for psychological or social change, rather than a particular quality of experience and beauty.
- **Ritual** – repeated practices, esp. opening and closing, designed to value the story and play apart from any conscious valuation.
  - *Drama therapy* practices focus more on processing than “holding” an experience.
  - *Performance art* and other *improvisational arts* often focus on artistic expression and product rather than audience integrity, relationship and safety.
- **Social/Community** – audience stories, exchange and embodiment seen as integral to individual needs, healing, resolution, etc., not means to an end
  - *Psychodrama* and *drama therapy* focus on individual work and healing, while a Playback “conductor” trains to facilitate more of a collective experience.
  - *Playback Theatre* maintains distinctions between performer, teller and witness/audience while *Interplay* mixes these distinctions more fluidly.

# How Playback can inform therapeutic practice

## The benefits of Playback and similar mind-body approaches

- Research shows how difficult it is to break neural patterns and rewire the brain with talk therapy alone.
- Movement, gesture and sound incorporate other neural pathways, provide for more holistic experience and are often more effective than talking alone.

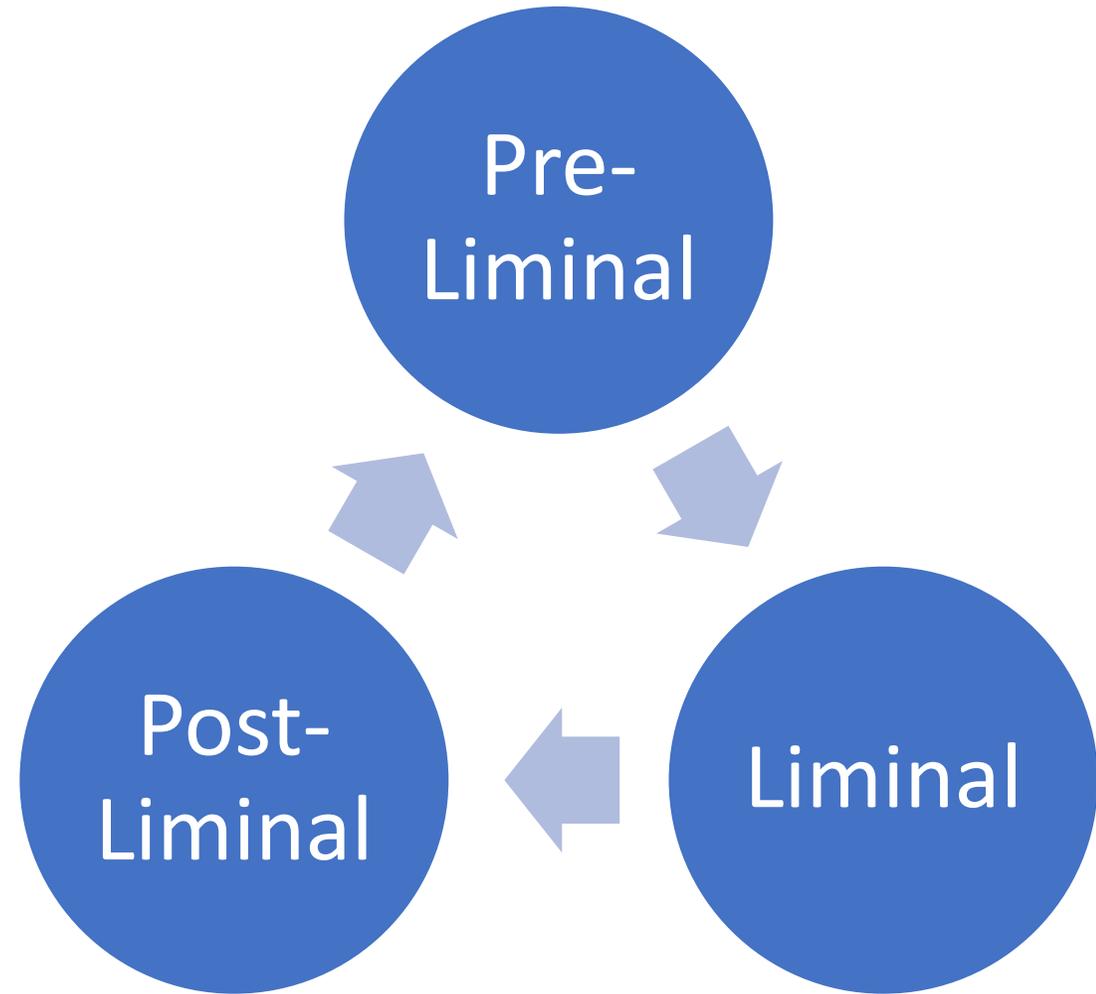
## Practices enhanced (individual and group practices)

- Consciousness of embodiment and disembodiment in practice
- Consciousness of “warming up” clients, practitioners to self, each other.
- Skills of listening for, naming essence, deepest notes in story.
- Language of improvisation useful for liberating engagement: 1) invitation, 2) offer, 3) leading/following.
- Narrative Therapy – focus on stories help people to make sense of experiences.
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

# Community-Centered Change in Playback Theatre

- **Pre-liminal phase** (separation)
- **Liminal phase** (transition via disorientation & reorientation)
- **Post-liminal phase** (reincorporation)

**Parallels of community-centered change** can be found in the anthropological research and writing of Victor Turner who explored and expanded on Arnold van Gennep's threefold structure of rites of passage consisting of a **1) pre-liminal phase (separation)**, **2) liminal phase (transition, disorientation and re-orientation)**, and **3) post-liminal phase (reincorporation)**. Turner noted that in liminality, the transitional state between two phases, individuals were "betwixt and between." They did not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they were not yet reincorporated into that society.



# Playback Theatre Resources

- River Crossing Playback in Central Pennsylvania: [www.RiverCrossingPlayback.org](http://www.RiverCrossingPlayback.org)
- Playback North America network: <https://playbacknorthamerica.com>
- International Playback Theatre network: <https://iptn.info>
- Centre for Playback Theatre: <https://www.playbackcentre.org>

**Playback Theatre** was founded in 1975 by **Jonathan Fox** and **Jo Salas** in New Paltz, New York. Their first ensemble developed Playback Theatre over years of experimentation, influenced by psychodrama and traditional forms of oral storytelling. It's practiced by more than 70 companies in North America and hundreds more in 50+ other countries.