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The Performance of Body, Space, and Place: Creating Indigenous Performance

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Author's Profile

I was trained as a theater artist in the Western tradition and first exposed to drama therapy while a student in NYU's Performance Studies program. I first worked with indigenous performance and Sociodrama as director of Tuma Theatre, an Alaska Native performance group at the University of Alaska–Fairbanks. My work with Alaska Native people revealed how indigenous populations were socially and culturally traumatized. Unlike Western theater, performance expression was not only a traditional medium of affirmation and entertainment, it was venue in which personal and cultural remediation could occur. Since then, I have conducted cross-cultural research, workshops, and performances in a wide variety of cultural and social settings, working in cultures as diverse as the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen, the Sakha of central Siberia, the Zulu of South Africa, and the Miao of China. I am currently developing a series of performance immersions that apply ritual and shamanic techniques in a cross-cultural context, bringing together my interest in the areas of mythology, media, experimental theater, ritual, shamanism, robotics, and indigenous performance, to respond to the issues relevant to our globalizing culture.

Thomas Riccio, MFA, is one of the most adventurous of our authors—his work has taken him from a career in the theater to working with indigenous groups all over the world. He continues to be active in teaching theater, where he received the International Distinction Prize in Playwrighting from the Alexander Onassis Foundation, as well as working with indigenous groups. Unlike our other authors, he also has experience in the media. Recent activity includes the publication of *Performing Africa: Remixing Tradition, Theatre and Culture* (Riccio, 2007) and work as Narrative Engineer for Hanson Robotics, Inc., for whom he co-authored several robot personalities featured at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. He is the writer-director of *So There* and *Orange Oranges* (2008) and *Some People* (2009), performance works produced by Project X. He is director of Story Lab, a post-disciplinary initiative based in Dallas, and is an artist-in-residence for Lul Theatre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Performance for indigenous people puts the everyday into the context and perspective of the continuum of living on earth. Performance (in the form of ritual, ceremony, and social expressions) gave humans their early understanding, interaction, and sense of some control. It gave humans a power by which to apprehend, consider, and create a place in the part of the earth they inhabited, comprehending the everyday mysteries that surrounded them, enabling survival and sustainability. Indigenous performance relied on culling elements from the surrounding world—bird calls, animal movements, the sounds of a certain wind, the pursuit of a hunted animal, and the feelings evoked by a spirit, for example. The sights, sounds, and rhythms of a particular place on the earth were momentarily held and celebrated. Indigenous performance danced, sang and drummed their part of the earth into being. This type of performance came about through a complex, spontaneous intuition, a trial-and-error interaction and process. When humans performed, it was as much for themselves as it was for the spirits, ancestors, elements, and animals. Place was not limited to geography and the material world, but a reflection of a gathered community, a manifestation of a totality, a system, concomitantly tactile and abstract, subject and object, witness, and participant. Place was animated. It was

the whole that gave order and significance, and it healed (Kawagley, 1995; Riccio, 2003).

Indigenous performance was as primary and necessary to existence as thinking, it was another kind of thinking, the collective's way of stepping out and viewing itself. Performance was a haptic, heuristic, and psychophysical way of community thinking, making visible and tangible, for a brief moment, the invisible and ephemeral. It was a way to see and feel the deeper structures of reality: myth, archetype, and ritual. Thinking and being through performance was a practical and tactile means of facilitating reflection, adaptation, survival, and evolution.

Modern, non-indigenous performance, however, has lost connection with its origins, power, and potential—the connection to the origins of its culture. Moreno (in Fox, 1987) posited that such cultural conserves underlay all creative activity and determine all creative expression. What activated the cultural conserve in Moreno's view was the spontaneous/creative process, which was at the matrix and the initial stage of any cultural expression. All forms of spontaneity are linked to creativity. All forms of the cultural conserve are linked to spontaneity. They exist together. When connection to one's cultural conserve is lost the spontaneous/creative is severely limited with the vitality of the expression diminished.

My work with indigenous and mixed cultural populations is based on this awareness and premise. I believe performance is a process of practical and immediate interaction and, through application, a means by which to help an individual, community and the world become whole again. The Indigenous performance to which I refer differs in form and function from the Western dramaturgical model in that it is participatory and, by its nature and necessity, interactive. Such performance demands interaction and participation for its efficacy in the use of all the elements of a community—human, animal, spiritual, geographical, and environmental. In this context movements, objects and linguistic expressions along with music—singing, drumming, rattling, or chanting—are endowed and charged texts which, when applied dissolve the boundaries between elements to create community. The templates and practices of indigenous performance, long neglected, marginalized or exoticized, can contribute to an evolving global consciousness. Coded within the form and function of such performance is the need to gather, reaffirm, heal, and demonstrate the responsibility

and interaction of the individual to their total human and non-human community. Such active creation is both expression and celebration of participation and wholeness of a particular place.

(Re)CREATING INDIGENOUS PERFORMANCE

The performance traditions of indigenous people provided me with a profound insight into the fundamental functions of human performance, which, in turn, helped me develop a growing body of working methodologies for my work in indigenous cultural settings. These settings included the Zulu and !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen of South Africa, tribes in Zambia and Kenya, the Greenland Inuit, Sri Lankan Tamils, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Sakha (central Siberia), and tribal groups in Korea. My work with non-indigenous groups has included groups in Finland, Russia, Italy, England, Sweden, Denmark, and the United States.

In every group—indigenous and non-indigenous—the methodology was refined to suit the particular group. There was no set methodology. Indigenous traditions everywhere are threatened by prevailing cultures. I worked with traces of the traditions that preceded me and applied and adjusted them according to practical need. The work was shaped by its local, social and cultural setting, the personalities, and external circumstances. Paying attention to the many-layered past and the present in terms of interpersonal, emotional, psychological, and physical sensitivities led to new agreements which enabled the groups to work together combining the old and the new. In the old world, for example, a tribe may have assigned the power to make decisions along hierarchical lines, with clear authority residing in the chief, then in the tribal council or elders, then in the men of the tribe and very little overt authority for the women. Newer experiences in combination with the general South African culture, for example, through interaction with government agencies, anthropologists, school teachers, doctors and nurses at the local hospital may have led—among many other things—to the women's claiming more power, to the chief having to share his authority with the authorities in the surrounding towns and state. Working out the consequences of such changes demands negotiation and flexibility, patience, devotion, heightened sensitivity, integrative intelligence, and the ability to read an environment, as well as the capacity to trust self and others in an environment new to the

“outsider.” The work resembles, in some ways, the work of the traditional hunter-gatherer.

The process of creating performance with indigenous people has no set formula. This is as it should be. Personalities, changing support structures and outside circumstances, such as old conflicts with the wider culture or with other tribes, require constant adjustment, accommodation, and negotiation in order to create indigenous performance. The work is a constant initiation, and requires a leader that can learn, improvise, and deal with surprises. The social, political, economic, psychological, and cultural tumult (if not trauma), which generally surrounded my work with indigenous people (and to a lesser extent culturally mixed populations), gave me a great sense of responsibility. Indigenous cultures are small, fragile, threatened, and much abused.

BODY IN SPACE

The action of locating and articulating a human body in space lies at the core of the methodology. By creating a performance place, be it a circle, stage, film, or other communal gathering point, a meeting place for the community is actualized. The performance place is both literal and metaphoric, serving to organize many formerly disparate spaces, objects, and actions into a meaning system. For example, initial work with the Alaska Native group, Tuma Theatre, was focused on identifying a performance vocabulary based on traditional ceremonial expressions. Concomitant with the establishment of a performance vocabulary was the exploration of traditional masks, drumming, dance, song, and historical presentations.

The re-imagining of the “*kashim*,” the traditional performance space, completed the process of extrapolating meaningful codes from the traditional context. The *kashim* held significance in that audiences sat on four sides with a center floor entrance (for performers). Additionally, a canopy of feathers above, representing the universe, was attached with sinew to the wrist of the drummers and moved with the rhythm of the drumming. The *kashim* was not just a performing space; it was mnemonic for the Yup'ik Eskimo worldview, whereby humans were part of a circle, without beginning, end or hierarchy, located between heaven and earth. Traditionally, all entered through the center hole (the earth) and crawled forward, animal-like. The circle of humans was

echoed by circles of stars above (as represented by a canopy of feathers in a concentric circle). The entire *kashim* was experienced as pulsating with the rhythm of the drums and the rhythm of the universe: they were experienced as one and the same.

The work of Tuma Theatre drew on the traditional vocabulary, codes, objects, and spacial presentation as containers or transfer points which (re)created a new-old place. It was a means by which the present could connect and coexist with the past. My concept of "place" evolved from my work with indigenous people such as the Yup'ik Eskimos. This concept is, at its core, the systemization of words, codes and signs (gestures, rhythms, objects) to create a deeper sense of self by way of a relational understanding of a totality. "Place" or "*kashim*" is defined by relationships, whereas "space," in my conceptualization, does not depend on a relational understanding of the self and/in the world. We all occupy many and overlapping "spaces" in our lives; "places" are different and more rare.

In brief, a performance place functions simultaneously as a catalyst, metaphor, and mnemonic for a society and its culture. In creating the place, participants take stock and reflect about their context, their values, and their particular perspective. In essence, it serves as an illuminating portrait, a working microcosm of one's world—how it is ordered and functions—identifying and affirming an individual's relationship and place within their worldview. The performance place is also a dynamic and evolving entity, one that responds and reflects, and, out of necessity, changes according to the social/cultural worldview. However ephemeral and transformable, a performance place remains a systematized arrangement of people, gestures, words, objects, time, and space, which provides the particular culture with a powerful tool enabling growth, adaptation, and ultimately, survival.

BODY

At the core of the methodology is the action of locating and articulating a human body in relation to space. The objective of such articulated action is to situate the body relationally in a space and by so doing create a place—the systemization of layered spaces. By creating a performance place, be it a circle, stage, film, or other communal gathering point, an assembly site is actualized. The performance place is both literal and

metaphoric, serving to organize many formerly disparate spaces, objects, and actions into a meaning system. A performance place is a site of agency, simultaneously catalyst, metaphor and mnemonic and ultimately a dynamic, microcosmic, and tactile diagram of how societies and cultures are expressed and formulated. Humans do this instinctually, for this is how the species enhances a body's ability to reflect, take stock, and survive.

The body is the sensory receptor through which we perceive and interact with the world. Space(s) is that which surrounds us—the environment, climate, objects, other bodies, energies, feelings, spirits, unintelligible and uninterrupted codes, signs, social and cultural conventions, and symbols. Space(s) consists of elements without inherent connected meaning. Place is both a noun and verb in that it is the act of signification of spatial elements, a systematization to create an integrated meaning system from multiple spaces. Sense of place comes from being able to read and connect to patterns, codes, and bodily relationships so as to create a greater sense of being, purpose, and perspective.

Performance (e.g., ritual, ceremony, drama) is, in essence, a microcosmic paradigm of how a body lives, comprehends, and organizes a variety of overlapping spaces and defines place. For many performance traditions the corporeal body is the unifying power of recreation (Riley, 1997) with its ability to hold together different worlds (i.e., spaces) and embody all times (all ancestors) and all constructs (e.g., heaven, earth, myth, gender, culture). In performance, the articulating body is able to unify, equalize, harmonize, and control the cosmos and put this world back to rights (Riley, 1997). In the Taoist tradition, which is at the origins of the Chinese theatrical tradition, performance “is intended to cause the gods to manifest themselves in the festival, the community assembly. The liturgy thus aims at integration and order, and moreover to ‘pass’ all being to a higher level in one vast movement, so that the whole world may obtain a natural, spontaneous order of the heavens and be at one with the cosmological system” (Schipper, 1993, p. 66).

Antonio Damasio (1994) articulates how a sense of body (visual, auditory, somatosensory, and so on) is primary, in neurobiological terms, to understanding environment, thinking, and in turn, to conceptualize space and place. The human body teaches us where and how the world is constructed. Our interactions with other bodies, animals,

objects, environments, and the sensations they evoke, are what we call the world.

Human life begins and ends with the human body. Human life is defined, and would be inconceivable, if it were not for the corporeal, sensual, and aware body in relationship with an environment, the spaces around us. We breathe in and breathe out the world; we sit to rest and gain perspective; we walk and map our world, we see the sky and comprehend proportion and distance; the sun warms us and we are delighted; the clouds drift by and we travel for a moment with them; an eagle takes wing and we feel soaring flight in our body; a squirrel chatters and the sound vibrates our bones and tissue; it grows dark and the cold passes through us and our feelings become more reflective; our emotions, thoughts and biology shifts; our imagination creates fear to compensate for our diminished sense of space; and then our imagination, emotions and biology shifts again with the warmth of a spectacular dawn.

But the body and the space around us are without inherent meaning or system. It is the felt, habituated and codified, set relationally between body and space, that creates meaning, and it is the systemization of this meaning that creates place. It is place that gives us a sense of belonging, continuity, and identity. It is place that aspires, enables, and functions for the survival of the body in multiple and overlapping spaces. Place is the ether of human society and culture. Place is a construct devised to function as a comfort, for it is a vehicle-vessel-device charged with emotion, value, memory, and significance. Place is what is familiar and known. Place is a system of meaning—a reflexive, interrelated grouping of otherwise disparate elements—creating a pattern of relationships designed to best enable consistency, functionality, and ultimately survival.

For indigenous cultures, spirit and material worlds were one and the same, one reflecting and revealing each other. Yup'ik Eskimo elder Harold Napoleon articulates a worldview, an inspirational template for my work, whereby spirit, body, and material spaces reflexively reveal the material, and spiritual, ancestral, mythic, and ritual ways of being in the world. Yuuyaraq is the Yup'ik word for the "the way of the human being," simultaneously a place and way of being.

When the Yup'ik walked out into the tundra or launched their kayaks into the river of the Bering Sea, they entered into the spiritual realm. They

lived in deference to this spiritual universe, of which they were, perhaps, the weakest members. Yuuyaraq outlined for the Yup'ik the way of living in this spiritual universe. It was the law by which they lived. (Napoleon, 1996)

The past ways of being in and with the world are gone but not forgotten, but that does not mean they are forgotten and that their wisdom cannot be mined and reinvented in response to the new, emerging, indigenous world many are in the throes of making—a new indigenous system of place. Body + Space = Place. The work I do is about locating the body in a space and defining relationships in order to make, negotiate, and re-imagine a (new) place.

THE CIRCLE

From prehistoric cave drawings onwards the circle, and its abstracted metaphor the cycle, has served as an expression of humanity's desire to identify and participate in wholeness, to grasp the essence of being, to be integrated with harmony, perfection, patterns, and cycles of the natural, material, metaphorical and metaphysical worlds. The circle is the symbolic representation of the cycles of life and death, ecology, cultures, and history that surround and move through us all. The cycle is a recombinant energy, one that returns and permutates itself with the power of life being manifest through eternal cyclical movement (Riley, 1997). Defined by Van Gennep and Victor Turner (Van Gennep, 1984, Turner, 1987) it is a transitional or liminal place of separation where spaces can be transformed and adjusted, and re-integrated into the individual's life and community at large. The circle also meant to establish a way of viewing the world, a perspective, and in turn a structure from which all subsequent work flows. Some of our beginning exercises established working methods, habits, and, significantly, the practice of side coaching.

Exercise: The Mountain

In this exercise, the participants are asked to imagine themselves as the mountain. Every aspect of their bodies represents a different part of the mountain—the head its peak, the blood the rivers and streams that nourish it, and so on. In this meditation, participants take on the

mountain's powerful aspects—its calm, its rootedness. These qualities can be used as the participants are guided to now note distracting thoughts and feelings, which they can calmly note, and let pass, as storm clouds do, over the mountain. The goal of this exercise is to empower the participants so that they can become free to choose among their thoughts and feelings rather than passively feeling at a loss.

Beginning in a circle and stillness became an operating motif—circle, cycle, return—and is an organic evolution of the circle motif prevalent in every indigenous culture where I have worked. The circle is central: from the Ohuokhai circle dance that is central to the Sakha people of central Siberia, to the healing circles of the !Xuu Bushmen, to the *kashim*, the traditional community house of the Yup'ik Eskimo. It is not just a circle; it is a mnemonic of a way of being in and of the world (Eliade, 1961). For every indigenous group I have worked with, the circle was a place of revelation, truth and safety.

RHYTHM

My experience with a variety of indigenous and non-indigenous groups has demonstrated the importance of re-establishing an awareness of rhythm in a performer's body and in their life. Rhythm also awakens and invigorates another kind of perception of attunement or synchronization between bodily rhythms and the rhythms of the things themselves, their tones and textures (Abram, 1996), what I term "rhythm reality."

The initiation of rhythm awareness leads to the re-establishment of personal and then cultural rhythm awareness, and it is from this foundation that subsequent work flows. Initial exercises bring awareness to the basic rhythms of life; the heartbeat and breath. Often semi-meditative, these exploratory exercises establish the basic biological self and one's basic rhythm. Such explorations also remind the performer of a simple and basic truth: that the self is the origin and medium of performance. The body expresses the internal-external-eternal self. By apprehending the internal self one can better express the social, cultural, spiritual and potentially eternal sense of self.

Exercise: Diaphragm Breathing

The heartbeat is an immediate and tactile building block in my work from which to reiterate, reaffirm, and re-imagine, self, space and place.

This exercise leads the participants from relaxed, normal breathing, to an awareness of the normal breath, to extending that awareness to the rising upper abdomen, as they breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose. Further instruction encourages deeper, fuller breathing to invigorate the lower body. Next, participants are asked to fill their lungs and to hold the breath as long as possible, exhaling completely with a sound. It is important to return to normal breathing often, as greater lung capacity is developed by holding the breath first for two heartbeats, then an increasing number, increasing the capacity for stillness as well as awareness of the heart's rhythm.

A further extension of this exercise is to ask participants to express the rhythm of their heartbeats into various parts of their bodies—for example, into their fingers, hands, head, and feet.

As the rhythm is used more and more successfully, the participant can express it in alternating, different body parts, returning to stillness whenever the rhythm is lost and awareness needs to be reestablished. Once the exercise has taken hold ask the performers to improvisationally create a dance-like movement based on their heartbeat rhythms. They can go on to dance with each other and add sounds to the movement. Costumes and masks can be added as the dances develop.

The use of sticks to externalize the beat can serve to re-introduce traditional rhythms, and subsequent development of dance signing, chant and performance, to the group. Such sticks should be no longer than the length between the wrist and elbow. Using the stick, drumbeats can begin with the heartbeat and go on to the discovery and sharing of personal (breathing, walking, running) and traditional rhythms and dances, to rhythms they discover in their environment. As these rhythms are shared, a group rhythm can be developed, which provides a reference for all subsequent work, becoming a simple and effective way to enable each group's somatic interaction with its cultural roots.

Every indigenous culture I have worked with has, at its musical core, simple rhythmic beat(s); many cultures have several. I call these primary beats. These beats often provide the basis of dance and performance movement. Dances with ancestors, with animals, and with spirits evolve from cultural rhythms as they are created and recreated by the group. With Tuma Theatre (Alaska Native) the exercise was very instructive, indicating the types of birds, the shifts in weather, and seasonal rhythms typical of the tundra.

As sounds are explored, the exercise can be extended by asking for the sounds of each season, as a group. The group can lie on the floor, gradually sounding together until a group sound for each season is developed. Sound can be further explored by asking performers to pick one short culturally specific phrase they would like to work with either individually as a group. They begin by closing their eyes and repeating the phrase for several minutes—in the same way each time—using the same inflection and rhythm. Then the group sounds the phrase, individually, together, dividing the phrase in choral repetition.

While working with the Sakha National Theatre, the performers suggested several Sakha phrases and chose one, “Nihau Oujugay,” a popular expression that means “very, very good.” The performers sat in a large circle, with eyes closed. The Sakha, who have powerful throat-singing traditions, extended the exercise into an opera of songs, with performers instinctually working together and playing off of one another. The exercise lasted over an hour and seemed to keep expanding.

This exercise also promotes discipline, self-control, and trust in the participants’ own bodily authority—something often lost in our habitually shallow breathing, and, in indigenous people from authoritarian cultures such as South Africa and Russia, from the discouragement of individual awareness.

Exercises to develop the performers’ movement in space involve their using rhythm to explore different moods and patterns. For example, they are asked to, “Move with strength...with fear...with love...power...confusion, spiritual conviction.” Movements leading with various body parts are added. “Move from your chest, from your heart, from your eyes.” In all of the movements, performers are asked to remain aware of each other, and to repeat movements that resonate.

If appropriate, performers are asked to observe three different walks of people from daily life and through their body, present their unique rhythms to the group. The theme of walking, like the theme of the circle, becomes an oft repeated and elaborated motif, evolving in increments that will be used in performance and deepening group confidence. To develop the performance, these exercises will be augmented and elaborated with vocal exploration, musical work, imagination building, storytelling, skills sharing, physical training, and ensemble building, most of which are readily available in books that describe role-playing and improvisational techniques. For the purpose of working with indig-

enous people, we will explore the exercises of gifting and skills exchange.

GIFTING AND SKILLS EXCHANGE

When working within the context of another culture (indigenous or not), there must be an assessment of pre-existing performance languages. Fundamental to many indigenous cultures is the notion of gifting (Hyde, 1983), which is consistent—in my view—with living with an earth that has given everything to humans. In many of the cultures I have experienced, the proper response is for humans, in turn, to give of themselves and/or their goods to keep the world in balance. For the Inupiat Eskimo, wealth was marked by how much a person was able to give away, a tradition of the Kiviq, the Eagle-Wolf Messenger Feast, which is celebrated to this day in Barrow, Alaska. Essentially, the story goes, the Eagle Mother gave humans the drum and rhythm, the wolves taught humans how to dance and live on the land, and the best way to repay them—because humans benefit greatly and are part of the cycle—is to exchange gifts. Gift exchange is simultaneously a material, communal, and spiritual act, intended to make the Eagle Mother happy, give thanks to the wolves, and give gifts to one another (Riccio, 2003).

In order to become acquainted with a particular culture, I ask the group to simply have a “show-and-tell”—with each giving something they know to the group. The two-week workshop I conducted in Zambia included performers that were Western trained and urban, many of whom were earning a living performing community theater plays sponsored by international NGOs. Such plays might dramatize, for example, HIV/AIDS prevention, hygiene, political corruption, and/or FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) for an audience of rural villagers. In working with several ethnic groups in Zambia, many of which had a history of inter-tribal and ethnic conflict, gift and skill exchange was a necessary starting point. The Zambia workshop also included traditional performers who had no theater experience, but were tradition bearers, such as mask dancers, drummers, and storytellers from a variety of ethnic groups.

The 2-week workshop I conducted in Lusaka, as a prelude to a 6-week performance development period, included nearly 40 participants,

some of them traditional "enemies" from 32 ethnic groups throughout the country. The objective of our work was to demonstrate how all of the diverse ethnic groups comprised the nation of Zambia. The Western trained, urban actors had little or no exposure to traditional performance of any sort, while the others had experience only in their own performance traditions or those of surrounding groups. For this project, skills exchanges of dances, stories, and personal histories were imperative. In the context of ethnic divisions, which constitute a root problem in much of sub-Saharan Africa, such a diversity of traditions performing together on a national tour proved to be a vivid demonstration of national unity, healing, and understanding.

Moving the Zambian group from the exploration of personal rhythms into cultural rhythms was easily achieved for group members with strong ethnic performance traditions. This practical skills exchange created an expressive and expanding vocabulary for the group at large. However, it is important to note that in terms of working methods and spirit within the group, this practice amplified the process of community and place building as it re-awakened traditional gifting values. Those performers from urban areas, many of whom were deficient in their own traditional performance expressions, offered acting exercises. Interestingly, as the Western trained actors, who initially looked down on the rural participants, became involved in the exchange, they developed a healthy respect for the cultural knowledge held by others. Skill sharing proved to be a great equalizer as the gifting created social bonding much like it does in traditional communities (Hyde, 1983). Also, within the context of skills and gift exchange, inherited ethnic issues (some groups were traditional "enemies") were identified and openly discussed.

From this spirit of openness, the group resolved that ethnic strife had held Zambia back and, as artists, they now saw themselves as leaders who had an opportunity to contribute to the healing of ethnic differences by demonstrating that they were all Zambians. As the performance developed, that theme was evolved and linked to a traditional legend, which showed how they were created as one people and led astray by greed, fear, and pettiness. As a gesture of camaraderie those who were "traditional enemies" taught each other their traditional dances and portrayed the tribe of their former enemy in a performance that resulted in a nationwide tour. The performance, which toured throughout the nation (oftentimes to thousands of spectators gathered

in fields and marketplaces), evoked the intended response from performers, audiences, and press alike, all of whom saw the process as demonstrating a new, enlightened perception of self and nationhood.

After nearly 30 year's experience of working in the field of performance training and creation in a wide variety of cultural contexts, I draw on what I know and intuit, adjusting or creating new exercises that serve the group's needs and objectives. It should be stressed that throughout the entire process, the work is discussed and reflected upon openly, its rationale outlined, and exercises explained and assessed in order to further share and make the work transparent. An essential goal of my process is to empower participants to understand and, if they so choose, continue and elaborate on the work in their own way.

SPACE

All the work previously discussed can be considered as prelude. Having internalized the circle, the body in space, rhythm and gifting, the work can now begin to focus on projecting self—into imaginative, cultural, and creative spaces. Discussion, free play and improvisation, as well other exercises are applied. Below are examples (selected from hundreds of options) to indicate how the work might evolve, keeping in mind that it is always shaped by particular circumstances and objectives. All have been applied in a variety of cultural and social settings and have proved resonant and adaptive.

Spot Journey Exercise

Participants are asked to identify a spot on the opposite wall or side of the room, to concentrate on the spot and then to move toward the spot as slowly and quietly as possible. They must move toward their spot as if it is the most important thing in the world, a metaphor that brings patience, and endurance into awareness. Having arrived as close as possible to their spot, participants are to stand facing it with eyes closed, breathing in through their nose and out through their mouth. Once three or four performers arrive at their spots ask them to turn (with eyes still closed) and then open their eyes and find another spot. The performers are then asked to add vocalization to their movements, beginning with low breathing sounds and increasing to express their

feelings as they approach their spot. Having reached it, they are to “sing” or vocalize in celebration of achieving their goal/objective.

After they have arrived and sung, the performers are asked to close their eyes and continue singing as more and more participants reach their goal, gradually tuning in to each other and unifying the song. Next, the participants open their eyes to find, instead of a spot, another participant on the other side of the room. As they move slowly toward that person, they are asked to develop a vocalization that responds to how they feel about that person and their own journey. As participants find their partners, they continue to sing together. Suggestions such as “singing” a song of arrival, journey, destination, or hope can help focus the singing.

This exercise can be extended if the group has accomplished the previous steps. The participants can be asked to join the whole group, where they can, still with their eyes closed continue to vocalize evolving a collective song of destiny, hope, or arrival. The use of words and identifiable language should be avoided because of its tendency to take the performer out of the instinctual mode and into an intellectual and self-censoring mode.

Three Movements Exercise

The group is divided into pairs of partners. Each participant is asked to develop three movements, anything they consider interesting and expressive, and teach it to their partner. Then partners are asked to create three movements each for a total of six movements. Generally a short period of time is allowed for showing these movements—three minutes at the most—to the larger group. Generally the movements presented are very telling, indicating pre-occupations and often yielding culturally or socially specific gestures. The facilitator gives no comment or judgment. After all partner groupings have shown their six movements, they are asked to suggest a scenario organically. The movements may repeat and can be in whatever order best serves the scenario, which does not need to make narrative sense. Each of the partners must do each of the pair’s six movements at least once in the course of the scenario. Sound, even dialogue, may be added for a third round of development. The scenarios are presented before the larger group.

This exercise can be elaborated. Participants—no longer in pairs—can be asked to develop three more movements, but this time one movement must be cultural, one personal, and one spiritual. The participants then present the movements to the group.

(The movements requested may vary according to need, context, and objectives.) In this variation of the exercise the performer presents the movements to the group. The process of the three movements in this variation of the exercise provides the raw material by which to begin developing the group's unique Ritual Preparation (noted below). However, it is important not to indicate the objective of the Three Movement exercise; otherwise group members have a tendency to serve the result rather than the immediate objective.

Case Example

In a workshop in Krakow, Poland, several women began to discover the body mythology of traditional male–female relationships and social–cultural–historical gender roles. The exploration of gender roles, which was not an objective of the workshop, evolved when the participants were asked to play the opposite gender. The passivity of the women played by men and the aggressiveness of the men played by women immediately struck a cord highlighting a disparity of perceptions and gender roles. Following this thread and continuing the playing of opposite genders, the work evolved into scenario building exercise.

At first, the exercise focused on a contemporary domestic scene and then stepped back generationally to the time of their grandparents. Various scenarios were collapsed into one emblematic collective memory scene for each generation, with participants adding detail and side coaching to the scenarios. Unexpectedly, this process re-defined the workshop objectives and shaped the course of the subsequent work, which went on to explore gender issues and their relation to sexual and emotional abuse in a changing Polish society. One cannot anticipate what the process will provoke or reveal; it is essential that the facilitator be unjudgmental, alert, and responsive. The goal for the workshop leader is to apprehend through one's body, emotion, and mind; to be present and intensely observant so that the necessary information can reveal itself.

PERFORMANCE

After establishing the body/cycle/communication/group/rhythm themes, the work can move into any number of directions, depending on the objectives of the project. At this point, it is important to keep engaging the body. Through the establishment of trust and the use of playful exercises, bodily expressions will become increasingly uncensored and often reveal deep-seated personal, social, and cultural expressions. These exercises, presented without the scrutiny or pressures of “performing,” provide a way of easing into the act of performance, like the sociodramatic warm-up exercises (Sternberg & Garcia, 2000) noted in this volume. A group may decide on a culminating performance (Eminah, 1994) based on themes and scenarios that have come up during the exercises. Projects that have sufficient time—at least 2 months of workshops are necessary due to the time, discussion, and exploration necessary—might develop culturally specific warm-ups, such as “Ritual Preparation,” which will be outlined below.

The need for performance lives in the dissonance between socially and culturally inscribed roles and behaviors. In our daily lives, we perform variations of what was performed before, what Richard Schechner (2002) calls “twice behaved” or “restored behaviors” (p. 22), and scripted, what Erving Goffman (1959) termed the “presentation of self in everyday life” (p. 28). For Jung (1998), the archetype was fundamental to identity, an individual’s “life script.” The individual’s archetype was for Jung only the beginning of corresponding thought forms, “in myth, laws, social, cultural, political, religious, economic patterns” (Segal, 1998).

Working in urban (indigenous and mixed cultural) contexts, I have often applied a variety of archetypal explorations to explore cultural and social roles. An example follows.

Exercise: Cultural Archetypes

The participants are asked to choose an archetype specific to their culture. Sources will vary, of course. With indigenous people, archetypes are usually derived from dance, ritual, mythology, and daily behaviors. In previous workshops, for example, the Raven and Coyote figures were chosen by Native Americans, Krishna by Indians, the Warrior by Zulus, and the hunter by Inuits.

The leader helps the participant develop the archetype's movement by asking questions such as: How does the character move? How is the body aligned? Bent? Straight? Where does the archetype's energy come from? Where is its center? What part of the body does it lead from? What is its attitude toward the world? Is it happy? Sad? Angry? Explore a variety of emotions. What is it that attracts you to the archetype? How are you similar? Different? What comforts you about the archetype? Frightens you? If the participant's images and ideas about the archetypes are vague ask the participant to expand and extrapolate from what he/she knows. Several different archetype explorations may occur in one session. The facilitator should note which archetypes have a special connection with individual performers. This exercise provides a psychophysical foundation from which performance and/or characters may develop.

Recent archetypal explorations (with mixed and non-indigenous groups, among them the Chicago Director's Lab in 2008) have included the non-gendered: the Lover, the Hero, the Warrior, the Outlaw, the Innocent, the Explorer, the Ruler, the Magician, the Jester, the Caregiver, the Creator, and the Sage. These explorations are centered on defining the archetype through a series of questions and psychophysical responses/explorations. The questions are: What is your core desire? What is your goal? What is your fear? What is your strategy? What is your gift?

The archetype of the Explorer, for example, has brought the following characteristics: freedom to explore the self with the goal of experiencing a more authentic and fulfilling life, the fear of being trapped in emptiness, the strategy of embarking on a journey to seek out new things, the trap of aimless wandering, the possibility of becoming a misfit, the gift of autonomy, the ambition to become and remain true to one's own soul. Eliade (1961) wrote that archetypes reveal a striving to transcend one's own local, provincial history and to recover some "Great Time." I have found that archetypal work provides the participant with an opening toward self-analysis in the context of myths, stories, primary modes of behavior, and social-cultural signifiers can be enacted.

Cultural and archetypal explorations lead to the articulation of a performance vocabulary from which subsequent performance explorations derive. The establishment of a vocabulary is an important step in reiterating and reaffirming a group's shared and collective identity, laying the groundwork for further work.

Exercise: Creating Elemental Forms

In this exercise, participants study one specific group of people—they may choose their own culture or another. Both group and subgroups are identified (see Figure 7.1). For example, if the group decides to study religious archetypes, subgroups may be Pentecostal Baptists, Hindus, Catholics, Moslems, and so on. The study should be limited to those groups that can be studied in person and/or by way of field research and/or media/video. Participants are asked to identify typical movements, gestures, vocalizations, objects, and use of space for their characters. Written and video notation is recommended. This exercise has been particularly useful assisting indigenous people that have been urbanized to revisit and examine their own culture and traditions through movements that may be remembered, but not in the context of their original meaning. Combining and reinventing the new and old can create a performance expression that expresses a particular present need in the context of tradition.

RITUAL PREPARATION

Ritual Preparation is a term that I coined when the processes I used repeatedly resulted in ritual-like actions. Bodily movements, gestures, actions, and vocalizations, combined with rhythm, create a sort of coded expression of a culture (see Figure 7.2). Their charged meanings reveal a living sense of the culture, its place and worldview. To express oneself through this coded language is to actively live the culture. For marginalized indigenous groups, such participation is empowering, for it is a psychophysical model of their way of being in the world.

In my experience, because it is an expression of their culture, the work of recovering and reworking traditional codes serves a social/cultural therapeutic value. The performers need to make it their own by re-engaging and reconfiguring the performance elements into a living example of a culture's vitality. A performance produced by this participatory process can serve as a demonstrable project the group has created, which can be joined by the greater community as audience.

The reaction of a Yup'ik Eskimo audience member demonstrates how one of the audience members—having negotiated the multiple spaces of his modern and traditional world—was able to enter the liminal place of performance.

The process of Ritual Preparation becomes the group's diagramming of place with the goal of public performance. Ritual Preparation serves to organize previously explored performative elements into an affirmative act uniting self and culture. The participants step out of a contemporary, Western-influenced world and "re-boot" their own worldview by reawakening their rhythms, performance language, and community. All the elements, all the spaces, all the participants coalesce in the place of performance (see Figure 7.3).

Ritual Preparation has been successfully used in a variety of indigenous and non-indigenous settings—with Alaska Natives, in Zambia, with the Zulu, in Korea, with the Sakha of Siberia, with a Slavic group in St. Petersburg, and with a variety of folk and multi-cultural groups in Europe and the United States. Ritual Preparation becomes a sub-cultural forum—a sequence of events and actions not unlike the time-honored performance formations created by shamanic practices and often codified by their traditions. My experience as a field researcher of shamanic and ritual healing practices in a variety of cultures—Sakha (Siberia), Zulu, Miao and Yao (China), Korea, and !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen (lower Kalahari)—has led to the identification of a similarity of pattern, method, and function among shamanic healing rituals, the inspiration for Ritual Preparation.

My role as facilitator is not unlike that of the traditional shaman, whose primary function is "to create a state of interaction, to bring out both his own task as mediator and also the role of the supernormal figures in the ritual performance" (Siikala, 1978). Fundamentally, such an action demands that participants join in the art of social role-changing, a transformation that often entails ecstatic role-taking techniques enabled by rhythmic drumming, singing/chanting, and dancing (codified movements) that bring on a gradual alteration of consciousness (Siikala, 1978).

When working with Alaska Natives, the three-movement exercise yielded many movements derived from social dances. Significant animals, such as raven, walrus, and eagle, were mimed and hunting actions such as spearing a seal or ice floe hopping were shown. Spiritual beliefs such as praising the owner of the universe became part of the gesture system. Depending on the size of the group, a few dozen movements can be presented. The facilitator then leads the group in a discussion to determine how to begin the preparation. Listening to the movement and its meaning is essential, as is associating a sound or rhythm to the



Figure 7.3. The warrior challenge section of the Ritual Preparation developed with the Metamorphosis Theatre, St Petersburg, Russia.

action. The use of rhythm brings the movements to life. As in indigenous ritual and dance traditions, the rhythm is difficult to perform without a performative action and vice versa—they are inseparable and indistinguishable.

The process requires every action, rhythm, dance step, and vocalization to be understood, detailed, and coordinated with other elements. For example, when a tribal dance step is introduced, its context needs to be discussed and learned, comparisons to other traditions noted, and then adjustments and adaptations made to suit the project's needs. The process is community building, becoming a positive and participatory template for not only the subsequent performance work, but for the development of a creative and educational perspective of the world. The process has the goal of teaching that (1) everyone is a creator and has ownership, (2) a new-old process is revealed and experienced, (3) cultural sources are identified, (4) the narrative of the past and future is re-vitalized, and (5) a demonstrable and shared expression is completed. Participants have variously described Ritual Preparation as “a healing” and as “walking with my ancestors” and comments such as “I feel proud of who I am and my culture” and “With it I don’t feel so alone now” abound.

Below are examples from the opening sequences of a Ritual Preparation developed in Zambia, with 26 different tribal/ethnic groups, and that of Tuma Theatre, an Alaska Native performance group.

Ritual Preparation: Zambia

The group circles, kneeling in position of reverence. After a minute of silence, the simple low beat of the drum is heard. The participants come alive, shifting to one knee on the ground (reverence position) and then begin to clap their hands, welcoming of the spirit of performance. The drum increases and the participants move convulsively to receive the spirit of performance into their bodies. Hands over their heads rise up to the sky as the initial movement reaches a climax. The participants wipe their feet, twice on each foot, to wipe away any evil spirit that may have followed them. Then the performers perform the recovered Woman’s Initiation dance from the Tambuka tribe, with a shuffling step with arms and hands in and out. The group moves counter-clockwise in the circle.

Ritual Preparation: Alaska

Performers gather in a circle around the fire, on their knees, eyes closed, their sticks gathered in the center. A faint drumbeat becomes louder. Slowly the performers pull their sticks from the “fire” and begin to accompany the beat to awaken the earth. The chant begins softly and builds as it is repeated: *new-knumb nah-llun-ghit-dah ma-knee ma-knee ma-knee wee-dall-but* (Yup’ik for “the earth knows that we are here”). The chant, drum, and stick beating increase in tempo and build into a climax that transforms all of the performers into their power birds. Transforming into birds and flying, the drumbeat is frantic at first and then slows into a steady two-beat rhythm as each bird performs a story/dance/song. The birds return and land in a circle and then stand as humans again, awaiting a signal from the drummer(s).

Ritual Preparations take approximately 30 minutes and are physically and vocally demanding, becoming the group’s warm-up for each work session. The Ritual Preparation established during my first year with Tuma Theatre in Alaska evolved and changed over the next five years, becoming a touchstone by which old and new members could participate in an evolving body of knowledge. As my own work as a facilitator evolved, I changed from viewing performance as created from an individual vision to a collective vision. Intended neither for commercial consumption nor for a wider audience, these rituals are seen as a collective and community event. Performance is a way of marking completion. Even when no one outside the group experienced a performance—as was the case with my work with the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen—it was nonetheless a performance vital to the community, a return to ritual origins, whereby a community presented itself to its larger community of ancestors, spirits, animals, and place.

The proof of any ritual performance is its ability to change and enrich the lives of the individuals and their community. Wilma Brown, a Tuma Theatre group member, participated in all of the exercises and explorations noted above. A shy Inupiat Eskimo woman from the isolated village of White Mountain (population 350) when I first met her, she later told me that her brother and uncles had sexually abused her for several years. She had undergone years of individual and group therapy, yet she felt that the retracing of ancient pathways had transformed her. In an interview with Dale Seeds from the College of Wooster, Wilma describes her experience:

Before you could understand what Tuma did for me, I think it's important for you to understand from what world I come. Before I joined Tuma, I had inherent questions about my heritage and place in the universe. I grew up with drinking, drugs, gambling and abuse with a small light of hope and love from my grandparents. Going to college was my escape from tragedy. My rage propelled me through the White Man and I left my home with many questions my people could not answer for me, like where do my people come from? What are my responsibilities here? What is good and what is bad here? I was traumatized in many ways spiritually and emotionally before I joined Tuma. When I joined Tuma, I faced some of my greatest fears about why I felt like a sick person. Tuma and Tom Riccio changed me forever. My world began to open. Wrongs toward my people were being acknowledged, the power of the people who once were was being asked for, and it was safe for me to grieve and ask for myself. I was with Tuma for three years, and with every year, I grew. I became empowered, confident, and learned to focus my rage in a different way. Now I am more expressive and have a deeper understanding of what happened in my people's past and what is happening now and what I can do about it. (Riccio, 2003, p. 7)

CONCLUSION

The deliverers of news services supply us with new evidence every day of the inevitable changes in our lives to come. Global warming concerns groups of people in all nations. Economic changes have filled the news. The technologization and virtualization of reality is a topic of frequent discussion. In many of the places I have worked, groups of people are aware that our earth and its inhabitants are challenging long-established ways of being in the world, into an era that will require a fundamental re-evaluation of who and what we are, of how we relate to one another, our self, and our planet. An emerging consciousness (Macy, 1991) is learning from the place-based systems that have much in common with indigenous cultures (Tarnas, 1991). Whether this consciousness is motivated by the necessity of political, environmental, or economic survival, or symptomatic of a larger historical evolution or cycle, is of no consequence. I believe with Macy that our sense of self and connections with others, the environment, animals, and spirit, is undergoing change, shaping a participatory reality sensitized to interdependence and holism. Humanity's wisdom and abilities are being called to task

in this process, including, in no small way, performance. The abundance of dance, music, and theater offerings, the explosion of cable offerings, films, and video games seem to me to be, in part, an attempt to explain, comfort, and/or prepare for the global transformation, which concerns us all. Performance, one of the most fundamental personal, social, and cultural expressions, has taken on a heightened significance. In a time of fundamental change a fundamental and grounding resource is being called upon. At its most basic, performance, in any and all of its diverse manifestations, gives form to feeling through a system of signs and codes in an effort to make visible the invisible. Faced with what seems to be unprecedented change, the groups I have worked with are accessing and re-examining historical and cultural resources (much of which were formerly marginalized or misunderstood); among them ritual, shamanism, traditional healing, and indigenous performance focused on harmonizing the material and spiritual worlds.

Performance aids a participant in recreating our world and it can be also a forum to which we look to understand the new indigenous place that is evolving within and around us. My hope is that we are all becoming earthlings and, with that, a more knowing part of a whole that now needs to be called in existence.

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