

Reimagining of Yup'ik and Inupiat Performance

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A few days after my arrival in August 1988 at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, I was asked if I would work with Tuma Theatre, an Alaska native theatre group. The offer baffled and intrigued me. I had left Chicago and work in the American regional theatre system out of disillusionment and artistic dissatisfaction. As the newly appointed assistant professor of Theatre, in such a unique and unusual place like Alaska, I saw an opportunity to reconsider my life, work, values and goals. Alaska native culture however, was as alien from my expectations, and mid-western inner-city, Italian-American Catholic background as one can get. If ever there were an unlikely person to work with such a group it was me. Intrigued by the opportunity of exploring another culture through its performance, I accepted, having no idea how or where to begin.

In the empty room given to me as my office there were several video tapes. Some were of previous Tuma Theatre productions, and the rest were of traditional native dancing. Tuma Theatre was organized in 1978 by a group of Eskimo and Indian students out of their need to meet and share dances and songs from their respective cultures. What I saw in the varied collection of video tapes seemed to suggest that the traditional and modern ways do not mix and are two separate realities. Were they judging themselves in terms of Western culture, accepting the categories and definitions of anthropology? Were they seeking to emulate a culture not theirs, rather than seeing, hearing, feeling, and expressing contemporary issues on their own, culturally inherent terms?

Alaska native people are both influenced and challenged by Western culture. Unfortunately, that influence has often been traumatizing and destructive. Today, Alaska native people find themselves existing in limbo between two cultures, a traditional and reassuring past and an alien and

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uncertain future. Their traditional culture, and cosmology, both deeply rooted in the stark physical beauty of the land, seems irrelevant in a world that values the immediate over the long term, change over balance, and individuality over communality.

Between these worlds, there is a great tension, with few devices by which Alaska native people can decipher, define and resolve who and where they are. Traditional performance reassures them of their past and maintains continuity with ancient values. The challenges of contemporary social, political and personal, life, however, all seemed beyond the capacity of traditional performance. As a result, to deal with contemporary issues, indigenous people often resort to the well-established mechanism of the Western performance tradition, often forsaking their own cultural point-of-view for an expression appropriate to their other, contemporary self and context. In so doing, they undermine themselves and their culture, unconsciously contributing to the demise of their own unique cultural legacy. As a result, both their traditions and those of the West, are deprived of their ancient insights and wisdom. Clearly, their performance is not some exotic "other," but a living, viable, transformable expression revealing startling new realities the Western mindset had historically chosen to overlook, patronize or marginalize.

To understand and work with Alaska native people is to witness the slow and painful swallowing of their culture by the West. We know it is happening, we see it, yet one feels helpless to do anything about it. There were fundamental questions that prefaced my work with Tuma. How does one preserve a culture? Should it be preserved? Change is inevitable in this increasingly interdependent world of the late twentieth century. Why shouldn't we let cultural progression or evolution take its course? Isn't history full of cultural assimilations, transformations, recombinations and extinctions? Who cares? Why care? Where do I fit in? Why and how should I react?

For whatever reason, for better or for worse, the dominant culture of the West, my cultural tradition, has had its way for the last thousand or so years. It is the culture that guides and shapes life on the planet in the late twentieth century. Today, the culture of the West, however, realizes there is nowhere else on earth to expand to. Now it turns inward, taking inventory in what it is, appreciating others, admitting wrongs and attempting to make amends. Western culture's strongest suit is its adaptability. The possibility of an emerging world culture, and the survival of the human race, will depend upon dialog and consideration of all the best humanity has to offer. The knowledge of Alaska native and other indigenous people the world over, needs to be a part of the emerging global dialogue. Their voices are critical to our continuing social evolution.

Unfortunately for Alaska natives and many other fragile indigenous cultures, the mechanisms of their transformation, absorption or destruction, are already in play. Each day an elder passes away, a part of humanity's legacy

passes from existence. It is as if we were watching a library burn. It is difficult to be a bystander. The question becomes how to best preserve the essence, on their terms, of an indigenous culture that offers centuries of existence and untold knowledge. In orally based and transmitted traditions, performance is both a record and key to their culture. It functions like a DNA braid of being, living on the earth, past, present, mind, spirit, and body. The earth still speaks through indigenous people, and their performance is a living text of their being, ways, history, and cosmology.

Watching those videos in my empty office forced me to reconsider my fundamental conceptions of what theatre and performance was, and how and why it functions. The axis of my reality had shifted, and I found myself at the beginning of a new path as a theatre artist and as a human being. I would never be the same. An opportunity had come, like all great things in life, by chance.

The Journey Begins

During the fall of 1988 UAF's Mike Gaffney, chair of the Alaska Native Studies department, and James Nageak, an Inupiat elder teaching in the Alaska Native Languages Department, led me to what little documentation existed on the subject Alaskan indigenous performance. As I was to discover, Alaska native performance was a rich terrain, one for which no coherent map existed. I would have to explore first hand, the geography of the performance culture, allowing it to take me where it would.

My journey began with the obvious, a library and museum study of anything relating to Alaska native people. The written record of Alaska native performance exists in fragments, scattered amid dry anthropological records, explorer's narratives, and a small amount of oral history transcripts. Video and audio tape recordings of contemporary festivals and dances were helpful, but only made me realize how the tradition had been transformed and how it presently existed as benign social events, far removed from the direct reference of their "savage," "primitive" or "heathen" ceremonial and ritual origins.

Few photographic or pictorial records of historical Alaska native performances exist. Those that do exist were generally staged by novelty-seeking white photographers, most notably, Edward Curtis. In my research, I did find performance artifacts to be in abundance, including masks, shamans' costumes, drums, puppets, dance sticks and fans, and totems. Unfortunately, any detailed indication of their function and meaning was scant. A wonderful resource was Edward Nelson, the indefatigable Smithsonian botanist, who in the late 19th Century became Alaska's great recorder of Alaska native lifestyles and collector of artifacts. However, like other early white recorders, Nelson generally did not comprehend the complex meaning and context of the numerous masks and performances he witnessed nor of the regalia he acquired.

What began to emerge from the research were bits and pieces of a puzzle. As a fuller picture emerged, however, I had to resist the urge to place the puzzle together with categories of definition, classification, and organization that were the inclination of my cultural tradition and training. Patience and respect were required I had to remind myself often to not condition the material with my own expectations but rather allow what I found to speak for itself. A fine balance between enthusiasm and caution was necessary. Anthropological research was one tool that helped to identify and record traditional performance occurrences, but it was only the entry point and the means to an end. My primary objective was to define the meaning, motivation, and methods of how to create Alaska native theatre. To do so, I had to pursue an essence and not the detail. It was in that essence, that I sensed what was important for Tuma. The detail would come later. Anthropology and traditional performance expression were but means by which the group would reimagine the traditional methods and expression, providing context from which to extrapolate the creation of a contemporary Alaska native performance idiom.

To prepare further I became a student of Alaska native dance, an activity that later proved to be a surprise catalyst to my understanding of the culture. The drum beat sent their cultural rhythms through my body. By dancing the stories of hunters, animals, and mythology, by transforming from hunter to walrus to moon to snowfall, I understood their culture in a way that no words can explain and only personal experience can teach. The heartbeat-like rhythm pounded out on drums stretched with walrus stomach, emotion-evoking throat singing, and a strict pattern of repeated mimetic movements combined to create a trance-like pathway to the Yup'ik and Inupiat Eskimo world view. Learning Yup'ik and Inupiat dance also went far to demonstrate my sincerity and commitment to learn of their performance tradition. Though not able to speak more than a few words of their verbal language, I could speak their language of dance. During one dancing session with dancers on St. Lawrence Island, an elder sat pointing at me, and chuckling. I had just danced a walrus dance, and I thought he was making fun of me. Through a translator I asked for an explanation and the reply was: "He can't believe how you can dance so good like an Eskimo. When he sees you dancing he says "It is like watching the Disney Channel!"

Mike Gaffney made the 1988-89 Tuma Theatre budget available for me to travel throughout Alaska to meet and work with native elders, dance groups, and anyone else who had anything to do with Alaska native performance. My work with Tuma demanded time and personal adjustment. I resolved that my work with Tuma had to be thorough, not only for myself, but also in response to the responsibility given me. My first year I traveled over six thousand miles without leaving the state of Alaska, to remote villages such as Chevak, Hooper Bay, Savoonga, Toksook Bay, Minto, and Gamble, meeting with elders, conducting interviews, dancing and singing. My objective was to record and develop a broad sense of performance styles, history, and methods.

My travel to villages was a pathway to understanding the context and function of traditional Alaskan Eskimo performance. Their rituals, ceremonies, and festivals evolved out of the necessity of survival and was a practical tool by which to shape and guide their existence. Inseparable, implied, and ingrained within their performance are their land, lifestyle, and spirits. It is performance that brought traditional historical and to lesser degree contemporary, Inupiat and Yup'ik people back to a rhythmic and spiritual dialogue with their part of the earth. Dance movements are memoirs of the animals, the elements, and their life. Their performance is simultaneously a metaphoric and metaphysical context for their daily existence with the earth and a participation in a spirit reality that, by its intent and expression, asserts living in balance and harmony with their community of place. It is a community that includes the human, animal, elemental, spiritual, and ancestral.

I flew in flimsy, noisy six-seat planes, often blown side ways by strong Arctic cross winds, traveling over hundreds of miles of unending white tundra or the ice floe-filled Bering Sea. Each journey ended on yet another gravel runway that suddenly appeared out of a vast whiteness surrounded a cluster of hundred or so houses, a church and a school. Standing alone on the tundra of Toksook Bay, overlooking the Bering Sea surrounded by vast and deep quiet, provided me with an understanding about the Yup'ik and Inupiat cultures, and myself, that will forever live with me. In the world view of the Alaskan Eskimo the earth is the measure of all things, and, by extension humans belong to the earth. In stark contrast, the Western world view, maintains humans are the measure of all things. This cultural view creates a disconnection from the ways of the earth, one that rejects the idea of interdependence with the earth, and between the animal and spirit world. The Western world view holds that humankind is central and the earth is secondary and subservient. Likewise, in the drama of Western culture, the earth and the spirit world it embodies, is but a backdrop for human action, ignored altogether, or exploited as a convenient antagonist. Traditional Alaskan native belief considers the individual differently, as someone who is part of a whole. A whole greater than what was physically comprehensible.

Being part of a whole is central to an Alaskan native cosmological view. Every thing is connected, all things are spiritually invested and transformational. The individual performer then, is a part of the whole, able to transform into an animal or spirit, becoming another part of the whole to which the performer belongs. To disrespect the earth, its elements or its animals, is to do harm to oneself. Traditional Alaskan Eskimo performance remains a means of recognizing and maintaining a sense of cosmological whole, both spiritual and material. Respecting and giving thanks to the earth, the animals and the spirits was standard text to Yup'ik and Inupiat performance. [Riccio, 1991: 14]

In a land of such extremes and experiences, every event, every moment, became a revelation. My most basic perceptions altered. Alaskan Eskimo

lands are blanketed with snow nine to ten months a year. The treeless, barren tundra is swept with constant blowing wind and the ever changing sky melds white, gray and blue into a horizon of sea or land. Distance is immense, disorienting, and distorted. Ordinary perceptions are easily altered to accept reality and illusion as one. The Western sense of time is rendered irrelevant on the tundra. Instead it is the rhythm of the all encompassing and mighty earth dictating the course of a day's events. Daily events, like those of the Eskimo hunter are not influenced by a wristwatch, but by the changing tides, light, sky, winds, and seasons. The call of a bird may indicate the approach of fish, seal or walrus. The sea's stillness or change in smell indicates the approach of a whale. In villages the rhythm of the earth is accepted and adjusted to—it can be no other way. Once, I was unable to leave St. Lawrence Island because of a snow storm lasting several days. It was mid-May and the storm had been unusual for that time of year. "This year we had two winters," an elder Jimmy Toolie shrugged. "We'll just do some more dancing, that's all." Snow covered entire houses to their peaks, and stairs, carved in the snow, descended from a level near the roof to a house's doorway. They adjusted to the inconvenience without much difficulty or complaint.

The final portion of my research focused on the post-contact experiences of Alaskan natives. By virtue of their isolation and remoteness, the Yup'ik and Inupiat people experienced late contact with Western culture. Unlike the Native Americans of the contiguous United States, the brunt of Alaska's colonization occurred during the early twentieth century. Today, the majority of Alaska's approximately 75,000 native people live in small villages. The Aleut, Yup'ik and Inupiat Eskimos of Alaska inhabit over one hundred villages along the Arctic ocean and Bering Sea. The Athabaskan Indians, along with a scattering of interior Eskimo villages, dot the great interior of Alaska with villages. The Aleut, Chilkat, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian Indians populate the southern areas of the state.

Many of the villages were built only after church, governmental, and educational pressures forced the nomadic Eskimo and Athabaskan Indian to settle permanently. The time of missionary fervor and settlement occurred during the late 19th and early 20th Century on the heels of fur trading, whaling, and gold expeditions. To forestall competition over a limited and isolated population, Alaska's Christian missionaries each agreed to limit their activities to specific villages and to recognize the sovereignty of the other's sphere of influence. As a consequence many villages today bear the indelible religious, cultural, and social mark of the church that missionized them. In those villages with Anglican churches, such as Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island, it is not unusual to find people with names like Cedric or Nathaniel, eighteenth century English names reflecting the influence of the Anglican church, particularly author's names found in hymnals.

The effect the missionaries had on the social, religious and cultural life of a small village unit varied. Some churches did not allow traditional drumming or even the speaking of traditional languages, claiming it was the

manifestation of the devil. To the colonizers, the alien, back-of-the-throat sounds of native languages inspired fear and associations with the wide-spread and influential practice of shamanism. As a consequence, the legacy of early missionary work still scars the Alaska native population today. There are several villages where few if any are able to speak their native language. Other villages such as Kipnuk and Buckland have lost their drumming and singing tradition. Many religious groups today acknowledge the misguided missionary zeal of the past and have made a variety of gestures of reconciliation and forgiveness. Atrophy over three generations, however, has broken the fragile continuity of oral tradition. Some Alaska natives are trying to recover their heritage, while others are overwhelmed by the task.

The events thrust upon a few generations have exacted a heavy toll on the fragile orally transferred traditions of Alaska native people. The forced break in oral transference and traditional performance practice is symptomatic of a fundamental reordering and conversion of indigenous people to an inorganic and alien world view. For the Yup'ik and Inupiat the forced colonization of the mind, body and spirit has induced self-loathing, confusion, depression, and trauma. The result has been a tremendous social, political, and cultural upheaval, that in turn has given rise to drug, alcohol, and domestic abuse. For example, the native people of Alaska have one of the highest infant mortality, fetal alcohol syndrome, spousal abuse, and teenage suicide rates in the nation.

Going to an Inupiat village today one might see the bones of a recently landed whale littering the ground outside of a school's computer lab, or a hunter flipping through fifty channels on his satellite, cable-linked television as his wife butchers a seal on the nearby kitchen floor. Despite the modern manifestations of satellite dishes, electric generators, and pre-fab bungalow houses built (and mortgaged) by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), village life has remained fundamentally as it has for thousands of years. Central to village life and its economic, social, political and cultural life, is the subsistence lifestyle. Alaska natives have retained their ancient birthright of hunting and gathering long after the Native Americans of the "lower 48." For the Alaska native, subsistence lifestyle is more than a way of life, it is a way of being and integral to their identity. It organizes, identifies, and perpetuates their culture. It has accordingly influenced the substance and form of their cultural performance.

The predicament of being in two worlds simultaneously is the source of their culture shock. The ancient world, which gave their life meaning and order, vanishes a little more with each passing day. The younger generations, attracted and influenced by the hipness, fashion, and glamour of the West, have for the most part, forsaken their traditional folk ways. Many of the native students at the University of Alaska do not know where or how they fit in. The Western culture simultaneously excludes and overwhelms them. For many young people, the elders and traditional ways are seen as either alien, irrelevant, or simply old fashioned, and as a consequence, the youth are

caught in the middle with few options or guidance. Despite Western culture's onslaught, a renewed awareness of traditional values and ways has emerged, and with that a developing sense of cultural re-evaluation and renewal. Like waking from a bad dream or recovering from an injury, Alaska native people, both young and old, are beginning to re-evaluate their ancient ways as a source of strength and identity.

In an odd twist of history and fate, an institution of Western culture, the University of Alaska, with Tuma Theatre, its Native Language Center, the Alaska Native Studies Department, Rural Student Services, and the Art Department, has found itself in the unusual position of being a tradition bearer and caretaker of Alaskan native culture. At the university many Native students learn to dance traditionally, speak their native languages, study native stories, meet with elders or carve a native mask. Tuma Theatre became a gathering point for the evolution and reimagination of Inupiat and Yup'ik performance culture.

The Practical Work Begins

When I began teaching Tuma Theatre classes in the fall of 1989 I knew enough about Alaska native performance and culture to acknowledge I knew very little. How was I to convey, within the context of an educational institution defined by Western cultural expectations, categories, analysis, and sense of reality, the performance of a culture reflecting such a different world view? The task of shaping and articulating all of what I had experienced and researched during the previous year into some sort of academic program while remaining truthful to the culture, was daunting. I could not help but feeling awkward being a non-native person presenting and teaching native culture. Was I nothing more than a latter day neo-colonialist? Was my effort yet another instance of a meddling white man thinking he knew a better way native people should do things? At the same time, would it be right to stand to the side and do nothing? There is a fine line between helping and harming.

Before teaching my first Tuma Theater class I developed a set of principles—a kind of navigational instruments for uncharted waters—inspired by Alaska native values.

The working principles (in no particular order):

- 1) Do not to presume to know, nor try to be an insider.
- 2) We have gathered to learn and explore their culture together.
- 3) We are all equal participants.
- 4) We must all endeavor to be informed, honest and sensitive to one another.
- 5) Differences will arise.
- 6) We all have a responsibility to one another and to the work.

- 7) The work is guided by consensus.
- 8) The work is as big or as small as we are.
- 9) We must all be willing to make mistakes
- 10) We must not be troubled about being corrected.
- 11) Authority is derived from trust and respect.
- 12) We are on a journey of sharing, working, and discovering together.

The first Tuma Theatre class I taught consisted of thirteen Yupik and Inupiat Eskimo, two Athabaskan Indians, and five non-natives (white students). On the first day of class I led the students in a group warm-up exercise to get an idea of how people moved. It soon became obvious the Western theatre styled stretching and vocal warm-up was absurdly inappropriate for the objectives and type of performance work we were preparing for. I stopped the warm-up and said: This is wrong. I don't know what we should be doing but this is wrong. We must create an Alaskan Native warm-up. The students looking puzzled, stood awkwardly. In the bodies of the native students were well springs of traditional culture and performance. The challenge was how to draw it out of them, how to learn from it, and then how to assist in the shaping of a contemporary performance expression.

The Ritual Preparation

The Alaska native students in the class had varying degrees of traditional song and dance knowledge. There were also, among the Yupik and Inupiat, five men who came from villages and were their families primary subsistence hunters. As an assignment the entire class was asked to present three traditional Alaska native movements. What traditional meant remained for them to determine.

At our next session each student presented their traditional movements. The Yupik and Inupiat are generally very shy people—so much so most of the women and many of the men in the class would not look at me directly. The avoidance of eye contact was in deference to my position and age. With this in mind I anticipated the presentation to be difficult, but a necessary first step. To my astonishment their shyness evaporated when presenting their traditional movements. It was as if they were not alone in front of the group, but rather performing with their culture. Many of the movements presented were lifestyle and subsistence hunting related, the majority of which existed, in one form or other, in their extensive traditional dance vocabulary. Mimetic movements portraying hunting, fishing, traveling, searching kayaking, and fire making were prominent. Other animal movements included walrus, seal, raven, grizzly bear, eagle, and whale. A smaller number of movements depicted natural events such as the northern lights, the wind, the horizon, walking across ice, and giving thanks to the spirits.

Through a process of group discussion several of the movements were discarded while other movements were consolidated or refined; those remaining were organized into a sequence to serve as a warm-up. A warm-up that was not only physical and vocal, but also, as it turned out, an evocation of their culture and spirituality. As the warm-up evolved through the following months it became known as the Ritual Preparation or Emmo, named for a fictive character we developed and whose story it had become. The Ritual Preparation was both a ritual and a story—the story of Emmo from the village of Emmonak, who travels and transforms freely from animal to bird to human as s/he hunts, mushes, and fishes among other things.

The evolution of our ritual preparation into the story of Emmo was significant and indicative of the Yupik and Inupiat cultural tendency of relating experiences in story form. Traditional stories, legends, and myths are central to their oral history tradition and the primary vehicle of historical and educational transference between generations. Animal-human transformations and supernatural occurrences fill traditional Yupik and Inupiat stories. Beside encoding myth and cosmology, stories also efficiently conveyed practical information regarding geography, climate, subsistence lifestyle, and cultural values. Their telling was also a social event enjoying a central place within their culture. Without our devising it, our Emmo diagrammed a hunter-gather performance narrative befitting the efficiency of the culture that inspired it.

The Ritual Preparation evolved into an ideal physical and vocal preparation warm-up. In addition to the function of a Western theatre warm-up that emphasized technical development and control of the body, voice, imagination, and expression, the Ritual Preparation would also serve as a window to the Alaska native world view. The preparation not only readied the performers physically and imaginatively for the group's work, it also provided the very tangible and culturally appropriate means by which to re-establishing a very immediate interaction with their culture. The Ritual Preparation became a kind of proving ground, reference point, and prototype for the reimagining of Yup'ik and Inupiat performance. Each movement, idea, sound, and transition of the Ritual Preparation provoked questions demanding exploration. For instance, the transformation of humans to animals implied another world view, which meant exploring human/animal relationships, animal spirits and guides, which in turn begged questions about the spiritual transmutability between things, which informed how the performer and group expressed this awareness in movement, rhythm, and voice. The creation of the Ritual Preparation provided an outline for the group with my role being articulator and facilitator. The Ritual Preparation taught us how to see and listen and be aware in a different way. It told us what needed exploration as it gave us the tools by which to explore.

The process of the Ritual Preparation creation revealed to the group a subtle, yet significant, experiential cultural understanding. Each element of the Ritual preparation became greater than its simple action; each was an

organic and integral part of the Yup'ik and Inupiat way of looking at the world. The experiential unfolding of the Yup'ik and Inupiat cultures became an act of homage and rediscovery:

The Ritual Preparation established Tuma's working methodology. Some to the key functions, insights, and principles established by the Ritual Preparation were:

- 1) Compact and efficient way of identifying and demonstrating to a group its own unique performance cultural language.
- 2) Focuses the work of the group.
- 3) A non-production, non-result oriented project that was allowed to evolve and change, establishing the foundation for important working principles.
- 4) Belongs to the group and was not for public consumption.
- 5) Establishes a group performance vocabulary and style.
- 6) Establishes and encourages open debate and interaction.
- 7) Establishes and encourages interaction with their performance culture—making it participatory and malleable rather than simply served and fixed.
- 8) Establishes an atmosphere and method of working unique to the group and to the cultural context.
- 9) Establishes a critical framework to which subsequent work could refer.
- 10) Encourages and develops an ensemble and rhythmic sensibility.
- 11) Develops a technical ability for quick rhythmic and movement transitions.
- 12) Created a story line, and in a sense a group myth, that lived in each member of the group.
- 13) Establishes a creative working methodology between participants and between the director and participants.
- 14) Establishes and explores culturally specific rhythms.

Elemental Rhythm

The traditional Yupik and Inupiat tambourine drum served as a natural accompaniment to the ritual preparation. Soon however, it became apparent some participants were more familiar and comfortable with the beat than others. Some, non-native and native participants alike, did not know how to dance traditionally, and for them the beat and its movement coordination were awkward. Rhythm awareness seemed intimidating and foreign, presenting a disparity between those that could and could not dance. Rhythm was central not only to the traditional dance and performance to which our work referred but also to understanding the reality in which the Yupik and

Inupiat people lived. A way for each participant to share and participate in the beat had to be found,

Central to the class explorations and becoming a reference point for all of Tuma's subsequent work was the traditional Yup'ik iambic two beat and the Inupiat three-beat. These simple, heartbeat-inspired rhythms are implicit to all traditional Yup'ik and Inupiat dance movement and song chant expression. Indeed it was difficult, if not impossible to separate the rhythm from their dance and song—they are parts of the same whole. The rhythms are what charged the movements and vocal expressions with life. These elemental rhythms also served as a pathway to the land and Yupik and Inupiat cultures that evolved from the land.

The plaintive rhythms, reflective of the land they have lived on for thousands of years, are in a sense, the heartbeat of their part of the earth. The endlessly repeating rhythm of the waves of the Bering Sea; the simple calm of the open tundra; the gentle sloping hills or distant mountains; or slow paced village life, lives in the plaintive rhythms. The rhythms, in their simplicity and repetition, portray a cycle of life, despite modernity. The simplicity of the rhythm is apparent in the way the Eskimo communicate, think, act, and interact, it is a part of how they perceive and live in the world, how they live with their land. It is a continuous and endlessly cyclical mnemonic of their life on a land. It is the expression of their land. Its expression is a dialogue, celebration, and identification.

Through a variety of exercises and improvisational scenarios we explored the basic drum rhythms of the Yup'ik and Inupiat. We referred to these basic rhythms as the "elemental rhythms." For those in the group whom were non-native, Athabaskan Indian or Eskimo coming from villages that lost their drumming tradition, the elemental rhythm explorations were emotionally affecting. The elemental rhythm exercises evoked a direct, intuitive, and emotive reactions that revealed a world view I have come to call "rhythm reality." It is a reality outside of time, logic, past and present. It is where the unconscious and conscious, the internal and external blend into one continuum.

It was interesting to see a Inupiat or Yupik from a village where the dance traditions have remained strong next to someone who lost their rhythm tradition generations ago. Like the non-Eskimos in the group those who have lost their drumming were awkward and self-conscious, a vital contact and inter-relationship with their land and existence seemed missing. For lack of a strong traditional and rhythmic reference point those from non-drumming (which means also non-singing and dancing) villages were generally the most removed from the lifestyles of traditional subsistence observance and understanding. It is as if they are somehow more Western in their thinking and lifestyle.

Our rhythm explorations and accompaniment went far to establish a rhythmical infrastructure to serve all subsequent vocal, instrumental, and

movement explorations and expressions. The elemental rhythm provided not only a way of moving, but also a way of seeing, being, and experiencing. The elemental rhythm became part of us, it didn't matter if the drum was pounding it out, implied in a chant or implicit in a movement, it became the ether that we shared.

Hitting Sticks, Healing Sticks

While working on the development of the Ritual Preparation I observed how those dancing traditionally would wear winter gloves or hold a handkerchief in each hand while they danced. The holding of handkerchief, traditional dance fans or wearing of gloves was in keeping with the Yupik and Inupiat belief of a person being more vulnerable when dancing. The palms of the hands were how unwanted spirits might enter a person, or possibly how a person's soul might escape, while dancing. As I watched the dancers holding their gloves I recalled the ornate and feathered dance stick the Yupik and Inupiat I had seen used during traditional dance performances. Held to either accompany or lead the beat, the Eskimo believed the rhythm lived in the stick. The feathers attached to the stick represents the breath of the beat.

By the next session I had acquired a pair of dowel sticks—each two feet in length—for each of the participants. The sticks immediately became incorporated into the development of the Preparation. The sticks would later become integral elements in the exploration of our work, as props, musical instruments, and mnemonic devices. The sticks addressed several needs simultaneously: 1) covered the palms, referring to and satisfying traditional needs; 2) gave the rhythm (symbolically and literally) to each participant; 3) made rhythm pro-active and participatory; 4) provided a group shared point of focus, interplay, and communication; 5) and it provided an important tool of performance expression and exploration.

The sticks also proved to establish democratic sensibility, making everyone equal, for in traditional culture women seldom drum, the rhythm being the domain of the men. By giving all participants, male and female alike, assertive and shy, the capacity to create rhythm, we made a small but significant decision. Though participating in the realm of traditional culture, but we were doing it as it applied to modern needs and circumstances.

Beyond the work directly related to the development of the ritual preparation the sticks proved an excellent tool for physical and imaginative exploration. Apparent immediately, was the stick's ability to extend the sphere of expression of performer. Taking a larger space was an especially important psychological step for the native participants who are otherwise physically and socially reticent. By expanding and extending the physical self they gained personal confidence as they explored a very new sense of how to use, relate, and express themselves in space. Subtle cultural and socially bound codes of space expanded. Complementing our mask work, the sticks served

the function of freeing the participants of their performance inhibitions while expanding their expressiveness.

Wilma Brown, an Inupiat from the village of White Mountain, was initially quiet and shy to a point of making others in the group uncomfortable. Through the use of stick exploration exercises she suddenly blossomed with self-confidence and expression. Her transformation was startling, but not an exception among the native students. Wilma's transformation, like that of others, went beyond performance applicability and significantly affected their social and personal development. Wilma has, since graduation from UAF (as a biology major) developed one-woman performances and continued her performance work with Silimuit, a Greenland Inuit group.

Imagination exercises introduced the transformational abilities of the sticks into lasers, magic wands, and talking sticks. Through other exercises they used their sticks as paint brushes to paint their homes, people they knew, the character of the various seasons, dogs, village details, and the tundra landscape. Beginning with exercises relating to environments and situations familiar to them, they imaginatively moved through a series of events from a traditional story. Such exercises were an unexpected boon for non-native students, allowing them an opportunity to leave themselves to gain insight into the Alaska native experience. For non-native participant such as Megan Evans, a former lawyer from California, these exercises forced her to vicariously consider native lifestyle and ways. Her perceptions sensitized her insights into the culture and native classmates and gave depth to her understanding of cultural rhythm and movements. The stick explorations also included personal expression work. Some exercises required the participants to use the sticks to express a wide variety of emotion. One exercise asked them to create a song of the four seasons sung with their sticks, body, and voice. Other exercises used the sticks to express the feelings they felt at that particular moment.

Expressing feeling so openly was a large step for the native participants. The expressiveness of the non-native students served as example, encouragement, and catalyst for comparatively shy native students. The decision to expand efforts and interpretation of traditional expressiveness was deliberate. Western styled individual expressiveness was seen as a tool by which the native students could explore themselves and their culture. Stepping outside of themselves enabled them to see themselves and their culture with greater objectivity and appreciation.

Drawing on the rich mimetic dance and cultural traditions of the Yupik and Inupiat, an entire series of exercises developed movement scenarios. Some scenarios required an appreciation of water and sky and moving to the cleansing the body with chilling wind and then warm sun; the night time and darkness comes, the moon shines then wanes, the stars appear and twinkle, the earth falls asleep, then the sticks fall asleep. We learned from an Athabaskan, Paul Mountain, about a recently revived and formerly secret funeral ceremony called the "Stick Dance." During the annual ceremony

Athabaskans from several Yukon river villages gather to honor the recently deceased using sacred healing sticks to accompany their mourning songs. Traditionally, the dead, upon hearing the sticks would go on to their final resting. In an exploratory exercise, conducted with honor and respect, group members evoked the memory of their deceased ancestors with the stick beat and individualized song. With exercises like these the sticks gradually became integrated with our performance work in a manner consistent with the cultural context we were expressing.

Traditional Yup'ik belief maintains all things are alive and have a spirit known as a yuaa." Over time the sticks themselves came to life, their spirits realized and endowed with power. The process of how the sticks became integrated into the work and into the traditional performance context was significant, guiding subsequent adaptations of traditional elements into a contemporary theatre context. Tuma participants eventually individualized their sticks with carvings, markings, beads, and feathers, reflecting the empowerment and spirit realization of the sticks. Through practice we came to understand, firsthand, the power of the medicine stick, divining rod, dance stick, and magic wand that are a part of so many cultures. The sticks became, in a sense, ritualistically endowed through our explorations and applications—the spirit alive within them.

Several stick Ritual Performance explorations also found their way into our performances. In *The Child From the Sea*, (produced by Tuma in March 1992), non-native Anthony Rivard, a former North Slope oil rig roughneck, evolved the aural and visual expressions of a herd of caribou. Anthony had observational experience of caribou and their behavior because of his time spent in the woods and on the tundra as a hunter. His ability to talk across cultural boundaries about the animals and hunting greatly enhanced the closeness of the group.

In other instances stick explorations evolved into more specific props. Tuma's (March 1991) production of *Qayaq: The Magical Man* for instance initiated bird, fish, seal, kayaking, and ocean wave expressions originally using sticks and later replaced with actual props. The influence of the sticks was apparent in the performer's sense of confidence, expressiveness, and expansiveness in space. The performer's larger than life movements extended into the performance space serving appropriately the mythic-symbolic-spiritual performance expression of Alaska native people.

Animals & Humans

Identification with animals is a significant part of Yupik and Inupiat traditional dance performance, cosmology, and lifestyle. Realizing the significance and respect given animals and birds in the Yupik and Inupiat cultures it was necessary to investigate carefully and fully, how and why to perform animals and birds. It was natural for animal and bird movements to figure significantly in our class explorations and the Ritual Preparation.

Most of the native participants had close, life-long interactions with the birds and animals so integral to their lifestyle. The observational opportunity and intimate knowledge of tundra birds and animals the Eskimos take for granted is difficult for non-natives to appreciate. Those who did not live and depend on a subsistence lifestyle can never really understand the special relationship of growing up on a barren landscape and sharing the land with birds and animals. Only by being lived is such understanding gained. To Western thinking animals are inferior others that either must serve or be controlled by humans. Western ideology, specifically the Judeo-Christian tradition, assumes an inherent differentiation between humans and animals and focuses on the explanation of the relationship between originally independent parts. It holds that humans have souls and the ability to attain salvation, whereas animals do not. (Fienup-Riordan 1994:48)

For Alaska natives, still primarily hunters and gatherers, the characteristics of the birds and animals of their respective areas were made familiar through seasonal observations. The relationship between animals and humans, however, was more than just that of familiarity and subsistence interaction. Over the course of several millennia the Yupik and Inupiat had evolved a highly intricate cosmological interaction with the animals. The differentiation of persons into humans and non-humans was for Eskimo peoples at the foundation of social life. The Yupiit believed all humans and animals—both male and female, living and the dead-shared personhood; however, within this category they distinguished human and non-human persons. (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 48) So important was their relationship with the animals that all major performance ceremonies and rituals dealt, in varying ways, with the continuity or relationship between the human and animal worlds. In this way both living and dead human and non-human persons were an integral part of the endless, an historical, and perpetual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth reciprocity.

The relationship between humans and animals was viewed as a collaboration with the animals giving themselves to the hunters in response to the hunters' respectful treatment. (Fienup-Riordan 1994:50)

Many of the rules and rituals guiding Yupik and Inupiat life in traditional times derived from their relationship between humans and animals. Animals were aware of human actions and some were said to be able to hear humans talking about them. Reflecting this belief, Yupik and Inupiat mythology is full of occurrences where humans transform into animal form and humans into animals. It is also believed that in early days all animate beings had a dual existence, becoming at will either like a man or the animal forms they now wear; if an animal wished to assume its human form, the forearm, wing, or other limb was raised and pushed up the muzzle or beak as if it were a mask, and the creature became manlike in form and features. (Nelson 1899:394)

Within the Alaska native cosmological context, to perform an animal was to co-habituate with it—to understand it, to have a dialogue with it—

and to vicariously become it. The forms of the Eskimo world were transformable, its categories permeable. Performing an animal would, for a Yupik or Inupiat performer, be no more unusual than a Western actor performing another person—for the birds and animals were “people,” too. Each animal had a soul, personality, and feelings unique to who they were, how they related to the environment, and what they did. They were characters in every sense worthy of dramatization.

Traditionally animal identification extended beyond the context of performance and into daily life. Birds and animals could be called to assist a person in a time of need or to lend them certain characteristics. Traditionally animal totems, amulets, and body markings lent a person certain animal or bird attributes—for instance wearing an eagle's claw for bravery or keen eyesight. Until the 1920's the Inupiat men belonging to the walrus clan wore labrets, pieces of walrus ivory pierced into their cheeks, to emulate and identify with their primary subsistence animal. By emulating the animal they honored and symbolically became it.

David Salmon, an Athabaskan elder from Fort Yukon, spoke to the Tuma group about animals and how identification remained strong to this day. I belong to the beaver people, and other people are always kidding us because we live in long wooden houses by the river. But we're persistent, hard-working people, too... Them Caribou people are always on the move, they can never sit still. so I never lend nothing to a Caribou person, because you never know when you'll see them again. And the salmon people, they are stubborn...I don't know how people come to be like certain animals. It all happened a long time ago before anybody can remember anymore. I just know that people are still that way. (Salmon, interviewed 10.12.92) Many of the native students (Eskimo and Indian) in the Tuma group claimed traditional clan identification with animals such as the wolf, walrus, bear or beaver.

As a part of the development of the Ritual Preparation each participant identified and explored the expression of their clan or “power” animal. Many native students (Indian and Eskimo) knew their animal identification, those that did not called elders in their village to find out. Participants not having an animal clan identification discovered their “power” animal through a process of drum induced trance. Once determined, each participant explored and created a story dance, a sequence of animal movements and sounds, for presentation. The dances were performed independently or as a part of the Ritual Preparation. Eventually each participant developed a clan or power animal dance for a land and sea mammal and bird. Often these animals would provide a resource of movement during Tuma explorations, story telling and performances with casting of certain roles determined by a performer's animal. Performers became, in a sense, authorities and representatives of their respective animals. Their power or clan animal informed all of their performance, be it human character or an animal not their own. The animal(s) would provide a point-of-view and

reference point for the group member's performance. Human and animal movements melded to express the unique world view of Alaska native people.

Among many Eskimos the wolf and bear hold a position of significance and respect. Because of the numerous parallels between the social, hunting, and rearing habits, the wolf has a position of special reverence. Paul Jumbo, a leading personality in the development of Tuma Theatre, is from Toksook Bay, a Yupik village in southwest Alaska. His grandmother, who was training as a shaman when the missionaries came, raised him believing his ancestors were wolves. Having wolves as ancestors was something he never questioned nor thought unusual. Paul wrote and co-directed *Utetmun (Going Home)* for Tuma in 1992. In the performance he played a contemporary native boys grandfather who came to teach the ancient ways of the ancestors. Throughout the performance the grandfather character comes to the boy as a wolf-human—transforming between his animal and human form—and being of both worlds simultaneously.

Similarly, the Inupiat believe at one time all humans were wolves and when the world turned upside down those wolves unable to return to the underworld became humans. "The Eagle-Wolf Messengers Feast," possibly the most significant and pervasive ceremony of Inupiat Alaska, builds on this belief. Known as the Kiviq, and revived in 1988 in Barrow, the feast celebrates and vividly illustrates the cycle of human-animal reciprocity and interrelationship. The feast is essentially a gathering of humans to pay homage to the Eagle mother (a universal spirit representing nature) and return the soul of her son to her. The soul of the son is a stand-in for all the game caught within the past year. The Festival, in its many and various manifestations throughout Eskimo Alaska, include many dances in which the performers portray wolves.

Tuma Theatres production of *The Eagles Gift* (March 1993) revived and elaborated on several of the wolf dances and animal/human characters inhabiting the original myth. In the myth the wolves teach the hunter how to dance, marking the origin of dance and song and how it came to humanity. The beat of the Inupiat drum is the heartbeat of the Eagle Mother—it is her gift to humanity. In order to keep the Eagle Mother well, humans must continue to beat their drums, dance, and sing. Simply and effectively asserted by this ceremony is the inter-active reciprocity of animal and human worlds.

Such an interplay between human and animal form caused no difficulty for our audiences to understand. The children in attendance especially appreciated the transmutability between human and animal forms, finding it easy to accept humans with animal characteristics, the stock and trade of children's theatre and cartoons. Some non-native adults did find difficulty in accepting the human-animal transmutability; generally their difficulty centered on not understanding the how or why of the transformation. Within the performance of *Utetmun* as with other Tuma Theatre performances, an undifferentiated universe was presented, in which the boundaries between human and non-human, the spiritual and the material, were continuously

shifting and permeable. The interplay between animal and humans is, in a sense, the objective and inspiration of the performance event.

Simple technical proficiency, based on mimetic movements and cultural rhythm awareness, was only a starting point for our animal performance work. However, such Western based theatre performance methods and techniques soon showed their limits. A very different set of objectives demanded the definition of a working methodology radically different from the way Western theatre operated. Tuma Theatre was not just about performing. It was about fundamental conceptions of self and one's relationship to the world. The Western conception of performance implicitly conceived the world as consisting of separate, hierarchical, definable entities, where the performer becomes an other through a process of analytical, rational or emotionally motivated techniques. In contrast, Tuma Theatre performed animals in contribution to a well-established, culturally informed performance language context. Animals were familiar, accessible, and respected equals, not an other. To perform an animal the performer becomes a part of an interchangeable and interdependent whole.

Shaman as Performance Model

Traditional beliefs maintain that an animal gives something of themselves to the person performing them. Its sound, its way of walking, talking, looking, being, and its special powers. The giving of attributes and the transformation of human performer into animal is no where better revealed than in the performance of the angalkuq—the shaman. The angalkuq had several animal helping spirits at their disposal with each animal or bird lending the shaman a spiritual or physical attribute. These spirits were both animal and bird—though ancestral spirits would also assist—and called into service as needed to combat illness, seek game, divine, or do battle with evil spirits. The fantastical Yupik spirit mask combines human, animal, bird, and symbolical configurations to vividly illustrate the integrative and transmutable sensibility of their shaman. The shaman was in the service of their community—their shamanic performance a pragmatic act of aid for the community. Within the performance the angalkuq might travel to the moon, become an eagle, go to the bottom of the ocean, become a caribou, or go to the land of the dead. The function of the angalkuq's performance was to facilitate transformation and maintain connection between the human-animal-spirit realms. All other performance expressions, whether including the angalkuq or not, were recapitulations of the angalkuq's function.

The leading of their community to becoming a greater part of themselves marked the significance of the shamans performance. The shaman's role was that of spiritual boundary crosser, experts in traveling and perception of greater realities, connecting with and transforming self into other spirits and non-temporal universals. Their expertise and value to their community lay in their ability to rupture the boundaries of ordinary reality and material

form and participate in the historical, endless cycle of existence as to assist in and address the needs of the temporal reality.

Performance was for the angalkuq, a channel to tap into a greater power, to gain understanding, perspective, knowledge, and comfort. This ancient understanding offered a knowledge, guidance, adjustment, and continuity to its community. It is a function of performance our contemporary world has grown away from or completely forgotten. Out of its traditional context and bereft of its spiritual initiations, Tuma Theatre found in the function, methods, and expression of the angalkuq a model that could guide, inspire, and inform all of our subsequent explorations and performances

Body as Script & the Mythology of Movement

Each culture has or specifically creates coded movement as a consequence of its social interactions, relationship to the earth, its climate, and other creatures. Some cultures rigidly adhere to these coded movements as sacred (given to them by the ancestors, spirits, or gods) and by expressing them provide a window to the sacred and/or mythological. These coded movements become both mnemonics and living, participatory pathways to a culture's origins. In a sense the coded movements of the human body are a living expression of a culture's mythology. Those cultures living more closely with their environment are generally more connected to such movement coding. The body was the primary way of relating to their part of the earth and their existence. The coding also provided a device by which oral cultural traditions could remember through the body. What anthropologists refer to as 'orally transmitted cultures' would be more aptly termed 'oral/movement' cultures.

Within some cultures the coded movements have evolved into highly detailed artistic forms, retaining and recognizing, in some sense, the relationship a people once had with their part of the earth. It is interesting to consider the performance expressions of Noh Theatre, Kathakali, the Beijing Opera, yoga, Tai chi, and ballet as formalized, codified, and reimagined coded movements from an earlier, and now removed interaction with the earth. Through codification these performance expressions hold, in the human body, their mythology and ancient connection with their indigenous place and way of being.

Alaskan Eskimo dance is unique among indigenous people in the degree it applies illustrative movements and gestures—the Eskimo themselves refer to it as story dancing. The movement vocabulary of the Inupiat and Yupik dance traditions are very similar, sometimes identical and often interchangeable. Inupiat dance, however is performed standing and can move across the floor, whereas Yupik dance requires its male dancers to sit on their legs as the women dance in place behind them.

Yupik and Inupiat dance movements illustrate a full range of expressions and feelings such as looking, hearing, eating, walking, hunting, joy, age,

surprise, talking, birds, seals, mountains, walrus, raven, northern lights. The mimetic quality of the dances evolves from the pragmatism of their traditional hunting and gathering existence. Dances told stories by movement for education, reflection, commentary, and in celebration of community. Dance stories are as vital to the transmission of Alaska Eskimo culture as is their oral story telling tradition. What oral stories could not convey the body conveyed in sensory terms, using rhythm, gesture, and performance. Dance enabled the Alaskan Eskimo to participate in their tradition proactively with the dancer understanding, and personally expressing the rhythm and interplay between human, animal, and spirit worlds. Dances were not the domain of specialist or artists, but rather something an entire community shared.

Entire multi-dimensional stories can be performed with one dancer taking on all of a story's components. For example, one Yupik dance tells the story of a hunter spotting a goose while hunting. The dance begins with a hunter traveling, then performing a beautiful day, the sun and wind. A goose, identified in the air, immediately and easily the performer transforms into a goose. Within the next move the performer transforms into a hunter and shoots the goose with bow and arrow, only to transform back to the goose and illustrate the wounded and falling bird. The dance ends with the hunter dancing happily and giving thanks to the day and the owner of the universe. The easy transmutability between human, animal, and element vividly portrays interconnectedness of their hunting and gathering cosmology and morality. Implied also is the ability of taking on multiple perspectives. In this way traditional dance transfers by representing, in immediate and practical terms, a deeply encoded way of life. The dance of the Yupik and Inupiat people is efficient, simple, entertaining, and practical, serving many functions at once, reflecting its origins and how a nomadic, hunting and gathering people had to be.

In keeping with its hunting-gathering origins, which mandated adaptability, many recently created dances have incorporated expressions of operating a boat's outboard motor, use of a rifle, playing basketball, and their enthusiasm for professional boxing. Their dance is not only a way of reflecting traditional events but also a way of incorporating new events into their own cultural context. Constant, however is the ever present, always organizing traditional dance rhythm.

The question confronting Tuma was: How do we access the rich, expressive dance tradition for theatrical application? Yupik and Inupiat dance movements communicate well within in their homogenous cultural context where the community understands, in a deeply ingrained way, the meaning and references encoded by their dances. But in order for these cultures to have a dialogue with other cultures—namely modern Western culture—some sort of adjustment of the performance language had to take place. Flexibility and enlargement of performance language would be necessary to meet the challenges of expressing themselves to a larger cultural context. A

reimagining their tradition would be necessary to address the issues facing contemporary Eskimo existence on its own terms. By breaking dance movements free from their traditional performance context we were able to identify a performance vocabulary. The movements, once freed, took on a malleable, recombinant life of their own. Defining Yupik and Inupiat dance forms was the first step towards retro-fitting traditional dance forms, allowing for contemporary theatrical expression.

The freeing of dance forms would prove to be both theatrically expressive and psychological liberating. The cultural and social trauma the Eskimo experienced when confronted with Western culture had forced their traditional expressions into a defensive role of self-preservation. As cultural repositories their dance traditions became emotional, psychological, and at times politically charged signifiers of cultural identity. By freeing the movements from their traditional context, and making them viable vehicles of self and cultural expression, the movements expanded and defined itself in a modern context on its own terms.

Colonialized cultures often define their general and vague idea of tradition around the time when their cultures bore the brunt of initial and traumatizing colonialization. The defining of cultural self in the face of an alien cultural invasion generally took the form of freezing their identity in song, dance, regalia, ceremony, and thinking. Tradition, as expressed in performance, became a necessary means by which to hold a cultures identity. Through time, however, a cultures idea of tradition became some sort of ideal. Traditional cultures tried to freeze time as a way of preserving self and culture, but by doing so denied themselves cultural evolution. For this reason the form, function, and context the Eskimo tradition was, and to an extent remains, essentially sacrosanct. In a way they had done what they often time resented outsiders for—they romanticized their own culture and identity.

As the class explorations and development of the Ritual Preparation continued, it became evident the movements most resonant were those drawn from the traditional dance vocabulary. These coded movements provided an alphabet readily available to our work. Led by those students having traditional dance experience, and drawing on my own dance experience, the group began a study of identifying hundreds of dance expressions. These expressions became known as elemental forms. By way of group sharing, research (via video tape and elders) and exploration the Tuma group defined the movements by separating these forms from their story dance context. Possibly the single most important influence in defining the elemental forms was that of Theresa John, an Yupik from Toksook Bay and instructor at the University. She is the most knowledgeable resource of Yupik dance in the state and I am deeply indebted to her guidance, insights, and continuing support in the evolution of Tuma Theatre.

What Tuma proposed by the separating out of the elemental forms was a dynamic altering, if not revolution, of traditional dance form conception and application. The elemental forms, once freed from their traditional

dance context, took on a life of their own and created something new. They became suddenly accessible and distinct expressive tools at the service of the individual performer and culture simultaneously. Rather than simply walking across the stage floor, for example, the Tuma performer would use one of the travel elemental forms to express emotion and situation. The rhythmically styled dance-theatre that emerged pushed the traditional performance idiom into a larger space—literally and expressively. It freed movements once contained by dance tradition and allowed the performers to enter a new performance space (i.e., theatre) with infinite potential. With a new understanding and application of traditional movements Tuma found a language by which to speak to a broader, contemporary audience while remaining firmly rooted in the tradition that fostered it.

The dance-theatre stylization evolved from the elemental forms maintained and highlighted many essential aspects of traditional dance. The performer, like the metaphoric performance space, was particular and archetypal simultaneously. The dance movements were concurrently in the present, past and future, implying a cyclical rather a linear reality.

The easy transformational ability of humans changing into animals, then expressing a commentary of the action, and then performing the wind or northern lights, demonstrated an easy inter-changeability and interconnectedness of all things.

Critics of Tuma, Eskimos, whites, and anthropologists among them, would cite the re-tooled application of Eskimo dance expression as being not traditional, therefore not being really Eskimo, even though made from the culture and by its members. Re-working images of self and culture through performance invariably elicited strong responses, some disapproving, but generally approving.

Extracted from their dance story context, each form identifies a distinct emotional and communicative expression. Often the group would improvisationally play with the forms to tell a story of their own making. Exercises included stories being told verbally with the performers responding with the creation of a dance based on the elemental form vocabulary. The list of Elemental Forms grows each year with the addition of new ones and the creation of others.

Two of Tuma's performances *Naam/Genehu* (*I don't know/Whatever* 1996) and *Yupik Arnaq* (*Yupik Woman* 1997) were developed entirely by a direct story telling technique. In *Naam/Genehu* two Athabaskan elders from the village of Minto were invited to UAF as Elders in Residence. The elders, Evelyne Alexander and Ruth Grant (86 and 64 years old respectively), told stories to the Tuma group. Their stories raised questions, which in turn, provoked more stories and soon themes, situations, and characters evolved creating a historical and mythological frame work for the performance. With the guidance of the elders, the Tuma performers evolved the performance, shaping characters and interactions to the needs of the stories and through

discussion with the Tuma performers. The performance came to life in stages with the initial rough outline gaining greater detail. songs and dances. The elders were on stage during public performances. story telling, dancing, singing, performing characters, and commenting on the performance as it unfolded. Because of their age and inexperience as theatre performers, the elders sometimes forgot lines or the sequence of the stories. This fact and who they were as personalities, was worked into the texture of the performance with the Tuma performers occasionally helping the women along. As a consequence the performance took on an informal, spontaneous, and communal feel befitting its cultural context. The performance was similar to how elders would tell stories to their children and grandchildren at summer fish camp. In a sense the audience (both native and non-native) vicariously became an Athabaskan community. Evelyne would often surprise the performers by expanding on her stories, or launch into a never before rehearsed story, advice, or song during performance. Such occurrences were surprising and remarkable. After one such occasions, Evelyne simply remarked It just come to me. Maybe it is my ancestors. They think you should know that story.

Yupik Arnaq was similarly developed, however with only one performer, Theresa John, who was also the source material. To develop the performance Theresa (a Yupik from the village of Toksook Bay) provided both personal and cultural source material. The performance was shaped through a several month process of discussions and performance explorations. During the process others would attend rehearsals, offering comments and suggestions. My role during the process progressed from that of interviewer to dramaturg, then director. Having known her for nearly ten years our rehearsal were often debates regarding a wide range of topics, including personal, political, cultural, racial, and gender issues. For a Yupik to perform a one-person show was a tradition breaking. Being communal and consensus in social orientation, the Yupik frown upon individuals stepping out of the crowd. It is culturally ingrained that such action is arrogant. For a woman to do so was especially provocative within its cultural context. However, for Theresa those culturally imposed restrictions needed to be broken in order to address the issues of how individual, modern Yupik (men and women) struggle to live in two worlds. Like *Naam/Genehu*, the performance was well received by both native and non-native audiences. *Yupik Arnaq* was viewed by many Yupiks as an important declaration of Yupik culture and the under appreciated role of women. Other issues raised by the performance included how images, stories, and ideas of the Yupik people have been appropriated and mis-represented by anthropologist and others who seek to exploit the culture for their own gain.

Sound, Space and Emotion

Tuma Theatre explored ancient Yupik, Inupiat, Athabaskan, and Inuit languages for their literal meanings and for how each specific language

formulated its sounds of the mouth, throat and articulators to convey emotion and ideas. English, albeit the lingua franca of the class, was recognized within our performance context as a power language with much political, social, and cultural baggage. It was a language to be used with sensitivity and consciousness and not simply as the most convenient communicator.

Need English be included in an Alaska native performance? How and why? Tuma performances such as *Child From the Sea* used no English at all. The use of English leads the audience to certain assumptions and expectations. It brackets a performance within a rational and linear perspective thereby subverting the affective, atmospheric understanding required for the presentation of the Alaska native world view. In Paul Jumbo's *Utetmun* the modern Young Eskimo man only spoke English which demonstrated his removal from the ancient ways of his Yup'ik-only speaking grandfather. Ultimately, it was the emotions communicated through sound and movement that brought the Young Man, Grandfather, and the Animals together. When the Young Hunter found himself confused by the modern world at the end of "Qayaq," the utterance of spoken English came, after nearly an hour into the performance, like a shock, slashing the atmosphere like a knife. It was exactly the effect we had hoped for.

On the most obvious level the use of a native tongue offered a certain sound poetry. Alaska native languages use the mouth and back of the throat to produce many unique sounds unfamiliar to many and seldom heard in public. *The Eagle's Gift* included the use of Greenland Inuit, spoken by exchange student Karen Kielsen; Athabaskan, spoken by Paul Mountain; Yup'ik spoken by Theresa John, Ringo Jimmy, and Esther Stauffer; and Inupiaq, spoken by Wilma Brown. The performers not understanding each other's language was inconsequential to the creation and maintenance of the performance atmosphere. In *Inua*, produced by Tuma in 1995, the Tuma performers experimented with English and applied it from a native point-of-view. This approach neutralized the English language's baggage, putting it on equal terms (for those not speaking a native tongue) with the indigenous languages used, and significantly opened English to new expressive possibility.

The choice of using a native tongue in performance, even though the majority of the audience could not understand one, was deliberate if not provocative. The gesture of having Paul Jumbo in *Utetmun* or Paul Mountain in *The Eagle's Gift* speak entire monologues in Yupik and Athabaskan respectively, politically and artistically demonstrated that the performance was on in native terms, and that the audience must go to the performance because the performance will not come to them. For native speakers the use of native tongues on a public stage was a source of pride, implied their language and culture were flourishing and on equal footing with English. The use of native languages prompted Tuma theatre member Melanie Brown, an Inupiaq raised in Anchorage, to learn her ancestral tongue. Others, such as non-native Geoffrey Stauffer have gone on to become fluent in Yup'ik.

For some native students speaking in their native tongue was simply more comfortable. One assignment asked students to tell a story told to them by an elder. Yupik Erma Hooper became very stiff and tense when it was her turn to speak before the group. After a few difficult sentences I asked her to tell the story in Yupik. Suddenly her entire body and emotional range opened. Initially her hands were stiff at her side and her head bowed. When she began speaking Yupik, however, she cracked a big smile, was gesticulating, and began illustrating all of the actions of the story. She told the group later that she doesn't feel alone when speaking Yupik: It is like my grandma and ancestors are with me. Repeatedly Tumas native participants proved their comfort and emotional connectedness while using their native tongue on stage.

Chant is a fundamental emotional expression of Alaska native people. With few exceptions, chants are pure sounds with no cognitive meaning. Meaning comes through emotional connection, physical evocation, and repetition. Many songs of Alaska natives are simply pure sound chants without any literal meaning; those songs having descriptive words also have substantial chant choruses. Chanting allows for a direct emotional communication between the performers and audience. Chant is a pre-cognitive communication both highly personal and communal (using and reaffirming sounds particular to the culture). Quite literally chant allows one person to vibrate another. Chant allows the performer to speak pure and direct feelings to another human being. The repetitive, cyclical movement of chant is also significant for two reasons: 1) it evokes cyclical world view and 2) allows for the performer to evolve a physical/emotional connection and depth of expression. Chant expressions, like the dance movements of the Yupik and Inupiat, find their origin in daily and subsistence activity. Many chant sounds and patterns echo animal grunts, sound of the wind, sea, or subsistence activity. Many geographically and culturally specific chants were incorporated into the Ritual Preparation and figured prominently in Tuma Theatre performances. The most frequently used Yup'ik and Inupiat chant sounds included:

Yuu-yu rru- u u

Unga ya ha ha

Ya Ya raa raa

Nga a- ya ya ya

U-u- u lu a-nga gu -u

Aa-ya-i ya-a nga ya-i-yaa-a

Tuma productions also applied chant sound as a way to identify or emotionally qualify a moment. This type of vocal commenting went far to add a musical texture and emotional complexity to the performances. It also was a way to tell the story across cultures—the communication was pure, direct and beyond cultural qualifiers. During Tumas production of *Inua*

(1995). Theresa John and I performed the roles of the angalkuq (shaman) who facilitated the telling of nine stories. Throughout the performance Theresa and I would comment on the action by using sounds and chants. At times the use of pure sounds, such as *li yi yi yi yi!* in disapproval of a character's action, would be unrehearsed, coming randomly and improvisationally, as inspired by the performance. Because of Theresa's knowledge of Yupik she would often comment, in Yup'ik, on the action from the side while I would chant or vocalize a commentary using chant. This application of native language, chant, and sound added texture, and gave expression to spontaneity.

Place and Expression

The dance traditions of the Yupik and Inupiat were strongly influenced by the cramped quarters of a village ceremonial house, known variously as the Kashim, Qasigi, or men's house. These semi-subterranean houses were where the community gathered, performing a wide range of social, ceremonial, and ritual practices during the long and dark winter.

Because of the lack of architecturally supportive material on the treeless tundra these houses were small. The smallness was, however, compatible to the small hunting groups that organized the Yupik and Inupiat. With driftwood from the Yukon river the Yupik created roof beams. The Inupiat, bow head whalers, used the ribs of the world's largest animal for roof supports to enable them to build larger ceremonial houses. Being in a traditional Inupiat ceremonial house was like being in the belly of a whale, their primary subsistence food.

Performance for the Yup'ik and Inupiat people is a transformational space where for a moment the wholeness of reality is exposed and celebrated. Traditional ceremonial houses of both the Yupik and Inupiat were less metaphors and more manifestations of the Alaskan Eskimo universe. Their womb-like nature was both practical and in keeping with origin myths of people coming from the earth as wolves. To enter a traditional ceremonial house a person had to crawl on all fours through an Arctic entry before standing up in the community house—a reminder of their animal to human transformation. One can imagine the impression such an entrance had considering the only illumination was a flickering fire or seal oil lamp and everyone entering had animal fur parkas. The smoke hole represented the upper world, the fire pit the lower world, the ceremonial house itself was the human world. The three levels symbolizing their cosmological belief in three parallel realities and how though performance there is an interplay between these realities. Traditionally built ceremonial houses have not existed since the late 1970s, having been replaced by village community halls and school gymnasiums.

Tuma Theatre adopted the traditional ceremonial house as its practical and metaphoric performance space model. The studio space, which exists in the basement of the Fine Arts Building, was stripped of its ceiling tiles and painted black. It was in this dark, womb-like space that most of our

exploratory and training work occurred. In contrast, the University of Alaska mainstage theater is a capacious 420 seat proscenium theatre highly inappropriate for the performance requirements of Tuma. Wooden risers were brought onto the stage (with painted curtains behind them) to establish an intimate 200 seat performance space conducive to Tuma's culturally specific expression. The average performance space created was approximately 14 feet by 14 feet and surrounded, depending upon the performance, on either three or four sides by audience.

Like its inspiration and traditional model, Tuma Theatre performances stressed an intimacy, comfort, and interaction with its community. To help facilitate this the tiered seating units were without chairs for the first three rows. The top row had chairs for those, generally older people, who need the back support. The padded open seating was by its nature informal, creating a familiar, open, and village-like atmosphere. The lack of seating structure motivated more interaction between audience members who could lounge, adjust, and hold their children informally. The movements and comments of audience members along with the occasional cries of children became a part of the performance atmosphere.

Tuma performances highlighted either direct or indirect audience interaction. Josh Weiser developed a traditional Raven character which became a prominent part of both *Qayaq* and *Utetmun*. Playing the Raven trickster (a creator figure for Alaska native people) he intervened variously throughout both productions serving as motivator, trouble maker, and action manipulator. Establishing a link with the audience he would often play tricks, improvisationally entertain, and guide the performance action.

The trapped stage floor of the UAF theatre provided an opportunity for Tuma performances to include a central fire pit and a variety of other floor entrances. The use of a central fire pit and such floor entrances were highly theatrical and expressed the transformational and multiple levels of reality that underlay the performance. We used a fog machine and lights for our fire pit, leaving room, as in traditional Kashims, for performers to enter and exit from the pit. The Tuma performances *Qayaq: The Magical Man* (1991), *Child From the Sea* (1992), *Utetmun* (1992), *Eagle's Gift* (1993) and *Inua* (1995) all extensively applied the use of the fire pit and other "animal" or "spirit" holes representing pathways to other realities in the Yup'ik and Inupiat world view. The use of so many floor holes for entrances were also practical, for it allowed for the quick and fluid entrance/exit of performers when no standing scenery existed. Its inspiration however, came from the Yup'ik belief that shamans flew into the sky to stars which were actually holes in the sky. Entering the hole the shaman would find themselves in a parallel world spirit Kashim where every action had a direct effect on what happened in the human village. For the Tuma performer entering through the floor holes, the performance space was the Kashim existing through the stars. It was a place of origins. Whatever happened in this Kashim happened on earth.

In keeping with this transformational quality stage actions lived in the shadows. Though using modern electrical lighting instruments the feel of mystery and unreality, similar to what we speculated it was like to watch a traditional performance in a fire-lit kashim, was affected by lighting that was generally low in intensity and positioned at severe angles. Light shift motivation often related to emotional or spiritual changes in the action—that being the story line we wished the audience to follow. Location shifts were also highlighted and as a consequence location, time and space melded.

To address the needs of this kind of theatre lighting designer Kade Mendelowitz, set and lighting designer Hugh Hall, and costume designer Tara Maginnis evolved a Tuma Theatre style. The style was not only revealed in how things appeared on stage but just as significantly included how they conceptualized and worked with the performance evolution process. Tuma performance rehearsals would begin with either a group of stories or simply ideas. Though discussion and rehearsal attendance the designers would work with the group and become a part of the consensus. The exchange of ideas and suggestions between the performers and designers was encouraged and often proved fruitful.

The use of flown in objects, as if from the upper world, further elaborated on the performance tradition of things “flying” from the other world. Traditionally a sinew rope coated with soot to disguise it was stretch across a kashim. On the rope elaborately carved birds or other objects would theatrically fly across the kashim to the amazement of spectators. In traditional times the Yup'ik and Inupiat also used sophisticated puppets in performance. For *Qayaq* designer Hugh Hall re-created an elaborate multi-tiered “heaven” modeled on those used for traditional Yup'ik ceremonies. Constructed of feathers, sinew, and wood, the “heaven” was attached to the wrist of the lead drummer and danced with the rhythm of the beat. All Tuma performances, except *Naam/Gen Enu* (1996) have variously applied flown objects, puppets, and carved figures.

The Tuma Theatre style, like traditional performance rituals and ceremonies, has generally stressed the highly theatrical and at times visually fantastical. Props, costume, and mask were the primary devices used by Tuma with the communication emphasizing the performer and their vocal, movement, and spiritual totality. The performance The thematic emphasis pervading the performance is transformation. Nothing is as it seems to be, everything is simultaneously what it is, yet at the same time something greater. Every prop, mask, dance movement, word or chant aspires to an essence of its meaning. The simplicity, grounded in pragmatism and a clarity of purpose, is the ideal way to suggest the greater complexity of their transformational and dynamically interconnected world view.

The Continuum

For the Yupik and Inupiat, the braid of meaning-reality-context, has remained as they have, as a part of the earth they inhabit. They, like other

indigenous people, recognize that they remain a part of something greater than themselves. The forms and meanings of what surrounds them are a part of them. It through their performance expression they recognize and celebrate that sense of greater belonging. Performance is a moment of magic by which to glimpse the ephemeral and ineffable wonders of a greater whole we know but will never understand.

When I accepted my position at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, I had no idea what I was getting into. In a way I still do not fully understand what it is I do. And maybe that is as it should be. In this way I will always stay alert in respect for the mystery surrounding me. Though the work presented above may seem logical and systematic in progression, it was not. How does one reveal on paper the personal interactions, contradictions, frustrations, joys, revelations, and instinct that was all a part of Tuma. The work is not done, nor can it ever be done. That is the humility revealed by the work. I am only a part of something much greater than I will ever know. Tuma theatre was but one manifestation of the cyclical continuum of the Yup'ik and Inupiat people.

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