



Schechner

Performance Theory

5

TOWARD A POETICS OF
PERFORMANCEHUNTING CIRCUITS, CEREMONIAL CENTERS,
AND THEATERS

The earliest human societies were hunting and gathering bands. These bands were neither primitive nor poor; the best evidence suggests an abundance of food, small families (birth control was practiced), and an established range. Humans did not live in one spot, neither did they wander aimlessly. Each band had its own circuit: a more or less fixed route through time/space. I say "time/space" because the hunting schedule was not gratuitous; it took into account the movement of game according to its own feeding and mating patterns. The cultural level – at least in terms of painting and sculpting – was very high: the masterpieces of the caves of south-west Europe and the mobile art of Eurasia are testimony enough. Cave art from very far back exists in many parts of the world, though nothing comparable to Lascaux, Altamira, and the others has been uncovered elsewhere. In brief, humans occupied an ecological niche that kept bands on the move in regular, repetitious patterns, following game, adjusting to the seasons, creating art/ritual.

Repetitious beyond modern calculation: evidence shows that certain

decorated caves were in constant use for more than 10,000 years. What kind of use? Human bands did not number more than 40 to 70 individuals, and more than one band used adjacent and overlapping ranges. For most of the year bands probably met only occasionally, by chance, or perhaps to exchange information and goods. Maybe relations between some bands were hostile. But indications are that at special times – when game was assembled in one area, when certain edible fruits and nuts were ripe for gathering – a concentration of bands took place. This still happens among the few hunting and gathering peoples left, in the Kalahari with the !Kung, at the corroborees of the Australian Aborigines. The farming and hunting tribes of Highlands New Guinea stage elaborate "payback" or exchange ceremonies on a regular basis (see chapter 4). Pilgrimages, family reunions marked by feasting and the exchange of gifts, potlatches, and "going to" the theater are other variations on this same action of concentration, exchange or give-away, and dispersal.

V. and E. Reynolds report a strikingly similar phenomenon among the chimpanzees of the Bundongo Forest in Uganda. The Reynolds' account makes me want to root "going out to the theater" or "ceremonial gathering" in behavior common to humans and certain other species.

Garner (1896: 59–60) wrote that, according to native hearsay, "one of the most remarkable habits of the chimpanzee is the *kanjo* as it is called in the native tongue. The word . . . implies more of the idea of "carnival." It is believed that more than one family takes part in these festivities." He went on to describe how the chimpanzees fashion a drum from damp clay and wait for it to dry. Then "the chimpanzees assemble by night in great numbers and then the carnival begins. One or two will beat violently on this dry clay, while others jump up and down in a wild grotesque manner. Some of them utter long rolling sounds as if trying to sing . . . and the festivities continue in this fashion for hours." Apart from the question of the drum, the account given above describes quite well what occurred in the Bundongo Forest in its extreme form, as we heard it six times, once when we were very close to the chimpanzees. Only twice, however, did this happen at night; the four other times it lasted for a few hours during the daytime.

The "carnivals" consisted of prolonged noise for periods of hours, whereas ordinary outbursts of calling and drumming lasted a few minutes only. Although it was not possible to know the reason for this unusual behavior, twice it seemed to be associated with the meeting at a common food source of bands that may have been relatively unfamiliar to each other.

(Reynolds and Reynolds 1965: 408-9)

The Reynolds aren't sure what the carnivals were for – they think it may signal a move from one food source to another: it occurs when certain edible fruits are ripe. The nineteenth-century report indicating some kind of entertainment (singing, dancing, drumming) apparently romanticized and anthropomorphized the gathering of chimpanzees. But the Reynolds confirmed the nineteenth-century report of a mood of excitement and well-being permeating the meeting of animals from different bands who are on friendly terms with each other.

Calls were coming from all directions at once and all groups concerned seemed to be moving about rapidly. As we oriented the source of one outburst, another came from another direction. Stamping and fast-running feet were heard sometimes behind, sometimes in front and howling outbursts and prolonged rolls of drums (as many as 13 rapid beats) shaking the ground surprised us every few yards.

(Reynolds and Reynolds 1965: 409)

Aren't these "carnivals" prototypes of celebratory, theatrical events? Their qualities are worth nothing: 1) a gathering of bands – not individuals – who are neither living with nor total strangers to each other; 2) the sharing of food or, at least, a food source; 3) singing, dancing (rhythmic movement), drumming: entertainment; 4) use of a place that is not "home" for any group as the grounds for the gathering. (In regard to the last point I note that even in our own culture parties held in the home use rooms specially marked out or decorated "for the occasion," while other rooms are more or less off limits.)

The entertainment aspects of gatherings are of special importance. Western thinkers have too often split ritual from entertainment privileging ritual over entertainment. It has been accepted wisdom to assert

that ritual comes first (historically, conceptually), with entertainment arising later as a derivation or even deterioration of ritual. Ritual is "serious" while entertainment is "frivolous." These are prejudiced culture-bound conclusions. As I tried to show in chapter 4, entertainment and ritual are braided together, neither one being the "original" of the other. At celebratory gatherings people are free to engage in behavior that would otherwise be forbidden. Even more, special non-ordinary, otherwise forbidden (frequently promiscuous) behavior is not only permitted, but encouraged, prepared for, and rehearsed. Behavior during carnival combines or alternates with prescribed spontaneity with large-scale public performances.

Where two or more groups meet on a seasonal schedule, where there is abundant food either available or stored, and where there is a geographical marker – cave, hill, waterhole, etc. – there is likelihood of a ceremonial center (see figure 5.1). Of the many differences between

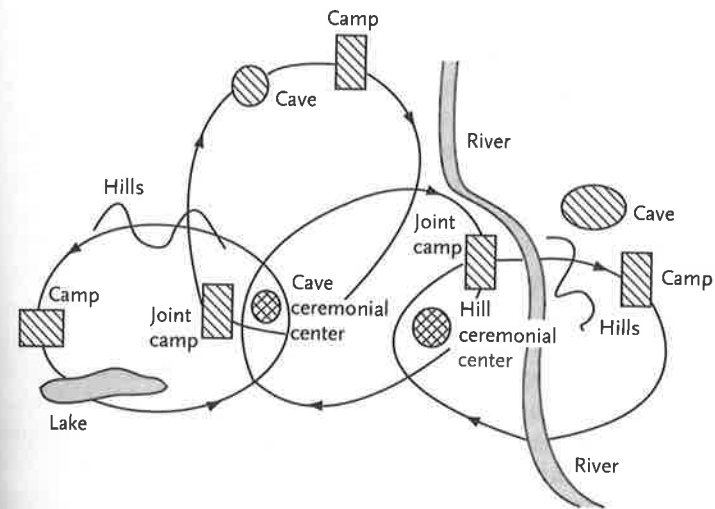


Figure 5.1

Note

At places where seasonal hunting places intersect at a landmark, ceremonial centers arise.

human and ape ceremonial centers none is more decisive than the fact that only humans permanently transform the space by "writing" on it or attaching a lore to it. The art in the caves of south-west Europe and the stories of the Aborigines about the landmarks in their range are means of transforming natural spaces into cultural places: ways of making theaters. But every architectural construction or modification is the making of a cultural place — what is special about a theater?

A theater is a place whose only or main use is to stage or enact performances. It is my belief that this kind of space, a theater place, did not arrive late in human cultures (say with the Greeks of the fifth century BCE) but was there from the beginning — is itself one of the characteristics of our species. The first theaters were ceremonial centers — part of a system of hunting, following food sources according to a seasonal schedule, meeting other human bands, celebrating, and marking the celebration by some kind of writing on a space: an integration of geography, calendar, social interaction, and the proclivity of people to transform nature into culture. The first theaters were not merely "natural spaces" — as is the Bundongo Forest where the chimpanzees stage their carnivals — but were also, and fundamentally, "cultural places." The transformation of space into place means to construct a theater; this transformation is accomplished by "writing on the space," as the cave art of the Paleolithic period demonstrates so well.¹ This writing need not be visual, it can be oral as with the Aborigines. The Aborigines are a people with few material possessions but possessing a culture rich in kinship systems, rites, myths, songs, and dances. With them the transformation of space into place cannot be seen so much as it can be heard. Or, similarly but in an environment as different as can be imagined from the desert home of the Aborigines, the central-African Mbuti move confidently through their sacred tropical forest singing and dancing their Molimo (see Turnbull 1962, 1985, 1988). What characterizes Mbuti Molimo ritual is the sound of the Molimo wooden trumpet and the pattern of the dances associated with it. The Molimo, hidden "vertically in a tree near the sacred center of the forest moves toward the camp, relocating the sacred center as it breathes air, drinks water, is rubbed with earth, and finally manifests itself over fire. At this point the sanctity of the forest center envelops the camp" (Turnbull 1985: 16). Remembering the Aborigines and the Mbuti we

must be cautious when assuming an area that has left little visual evidence of high art is necessarily artistically impoverished.

The functions of the ceremonies — the performances — at the ceremonial centers, and the exact procedures, cannot be known precisely. Heel-marks left in the clay in at least one of the caves indicate dancing; authorities generally agree that performances of some kind took place.² But more often than not the reconstructions suit the tastes of the reconstructor: fertility rites, initiations, shamanist-curing, and so on. My own tastes run toward "ecological rituals" such as outlined by Roy A. Rappaport: performances which regulate economic, political, and religious interaction among neighboring groups whose relation with each other is ambivalently collaborative and hostile. In fact, Rappaport (1968) discusses war as part of a total ecological system. My own views are close to Rappaport's:

ritual, particularly in the context of a ritual cycle, operates as a regulating mechanism in a system, or set of interlocking systems, in which such variables as the area of available land, necessary lengths of fallow periods, size and composition of both human and pig populations, trophic requirements of pigs and people, energy expended in various activities, and the frequency of misfortunes are included. . . . Underlying these hypotheses is the belief that much is to be gained by regarding culture, in some of its aspects, as part of the means by which animals of the human species maintain themselves in their environments.

(Rappaport 1968: 4-5)

Rappaport is writing about a contemporary New Guinea people; I am trying to reconstruct performances of Paleolithic hunters — I think both bear on patterns within modern and postmodern societies. Extrapolating from Rappaport, from the pictorial and other evidence within the caves, and from patterns within contemporary theater I say that the performances at the ceremonial centers occurring where hunting bands met functioned in at least the following ways:

1. To maintain friendly relations.
2. To exchange goods, mates, trophies, techniques.

3. To show and exchange dances, songs, stories.

Furthermore, I think these performances followed rhythms familiar to us in:

1. Gathering.
2. Playing out an action or actions.
3. Dispersing.

In other words, people came to a special place, did something that can be called theater (and/or dance and music because all three genres are always performed together in such situations), and went on their way. Simple and obvious as this constellation of rhythmically organized events may seem to be, they are not inevitable when two or more groups approach each other. The groups could avoid each other, meet in combat, pass each other by as travelers do on a road, and so on. The pattern of gathering, performing, and dispersing is a specifically theatrical pattern.

This pattern occurs "naturally" in urban settings. An accident happens, or is caused to happen (as in guerrilla theater); a crowd gathers to see what's going on. The crowd makes a circle around the event or, as in the case of accidents, around the aftermath of the event or, as in the case of accidents, around the aftermath of the event. Talk in the crowd is about what happened, to whom, why; this talk is largely interrogative: like dramas and courtroom trials, which are formal versions of the street accident, the event itself is absorbed into the action of reconstructing what took place. In trials this is done verbally, in theater analogically: by doing again what happened (actually, fictionally, mythically, religiously). The questions asked in the crowd are those which Brecht wanted theater audiences to ask of theater.³ The shape of this kind of street event – a heated center with involved spectators fading into a cool rim where people come, peer in, and move on – is like that of some medieval street theater.⁴ Accidents conform to the basic performance pattern; even after the event is "cleaned up" some writing marks the site: for example, bloodstains, knots of witnesses and the curious. Only slowly does the event evaporate and the crowd disperse. I call such events "eruptions" (see figure 5.2).

An eruption is like a theatrical performance because it is not the

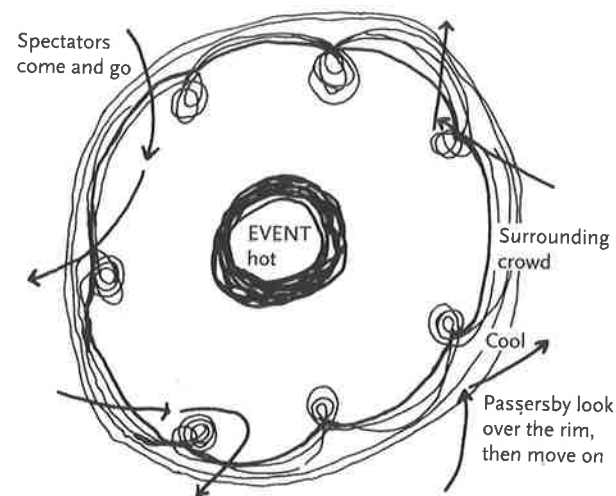


Figure 5.2 An eruption

Note

An "eruption" features a heated center and a cool rim, with spectators coming and going. The eruption occurs either *after* an accident or during an event whose development is predictable such as an argument, or the construction or demolition of a building.

accident itself that gathers and keeps an audience. They are held by the reconstruction or reenactment of the event. In the case of an argument or, at a much slower pace, the construction of a building watched by sidewalk superintendents, it is the unfolding of an event which can be measured against a predictable script (see chapter 3) that gathers and holds people. Totally unmanageable occurrences – a falling wall, sudden gunfire – scatters people; only after the wall has fallen or when the shooting stops does the crowd gather to make the theater.

Eruptions are one kind of "natural"⁵ theater, processions are another. Understood as a coherent system they form a bipolar model of the performances that took place in the ceremonial centers which arose at points where Paleolithic hunting bands, moving across the terrain on their seasonal treks, met. In a procession (see figure 5.3) – which is a

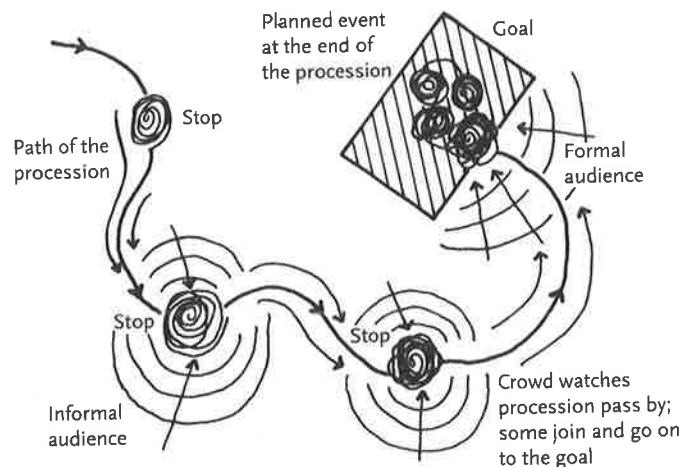


Figure 5.3 A procession

Note

A procession has a fixed route and a known goal. At several points along the way, the procession stops and performances are played. As spectators watch the procession pass by, some may join and go on to the goal.

kind of pilgrimage – the event moves along a prescribed path, spectators gather along the route, and at appointed places the procession halts and performances are played. Parades, funeral corteges, political marches, and the Bread and Puppet Theater are processions.⁶

Usually a procession moves to a goal: the funeral to the grave, the political march to the speakers' stand, the circus parade to the big top, the pilgrimage to the shrine. The event performed at the goal of the procession is the opposite of an eruption: it is well planned for, rehearsed, ritualized.

However, eruptions and processions can occur simultaneously, especially when large numbers of people are involved and the leadership of a group is flexible. The meeting of bands of chimpanzees in the Bundongo Forest is both eruptive and processional: at a known place in a known circuit, the abundance of food coupled with the encounter with strange bands triggers an eruption of the "carnival." It is my belief that

a roughly similar thing happened countless times on the hunting circuits of Paleolithic humans. Out of these hunting circuits developed ritual circuits, meeting places, ceremonial centers, and theaters.

Everywhere theater occurs at special times in special places. Theater is but one of a complex of performance activities which also includes rituals, sport and trials (duels, ritual combats, courtroom trials), dance, music, play, and various performances in everyday life (see chapter 1). Theater places are maps of the cultures where they exist. That is, theater is analogical not only in the literary sense – the stories dramas tell, the convention of explicating action by staging it – but also in the architectural sense. Thus, for example, the Athenian theater of the fifth century BCE had as its center the altar of Dionysus. When the chorus danced around the altar it was located between the audience and the men who played the dramatic roles. The Greek theater's semicircular tiers of seats – not individuated as in modern theaters but curving communal benches as in modern sports stadiums – literally enfolded the drama, containing its agons within the Athenian solidarity (see figure 5.4). Conceptually this pattern of solidarity-containing-agon was repeated in the contest among the poets and actors for the best play and best performance. The proscenium theater of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries in the west also shows a definite, but very different, sociometric design (figure 5.5).

The Greek amphitheater was open. Beyond and around it the city could be seen during performances which took place in daylight. It was the city, the polis, that was tightly boundaried geographically and ideologically. On the other hand, the proscenium theater is a tightly boundaried, closed individual building with access from the street strictly controlled. Within the part of the structure where the performance takes place and is viewed much effort is spent in directing attention only to the stage; everything not in the show is hidden or sunk in darkness. The building, like the events within it, is compartmentalized; the time for the audience to look at each other is regulated and is limited to before the show and to intermissions.

The proscenium theater is divided into five precincts (see figure 5.5). Theater workers enter through a backstage door unseen by the ticket-buying patrons. This is a version of the industrial practice of separating the factory where goods are produced from the store where

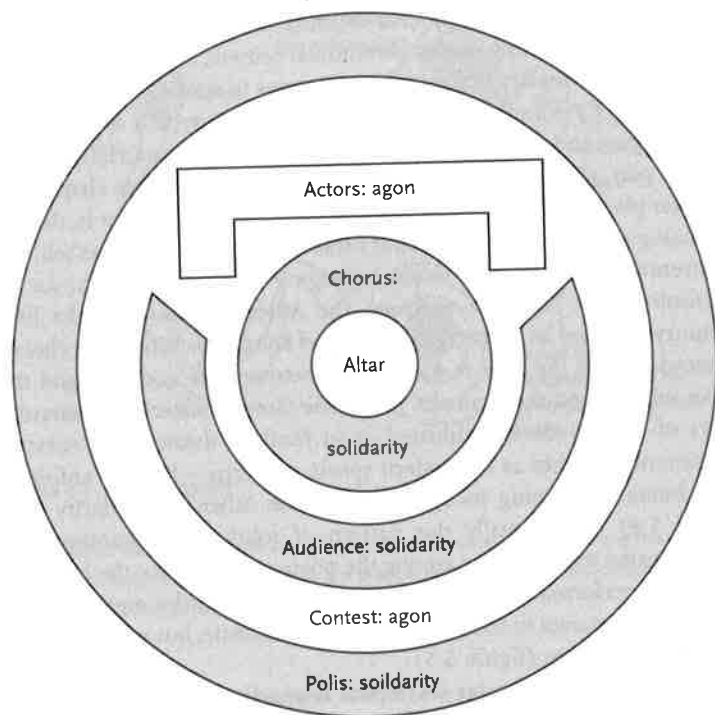
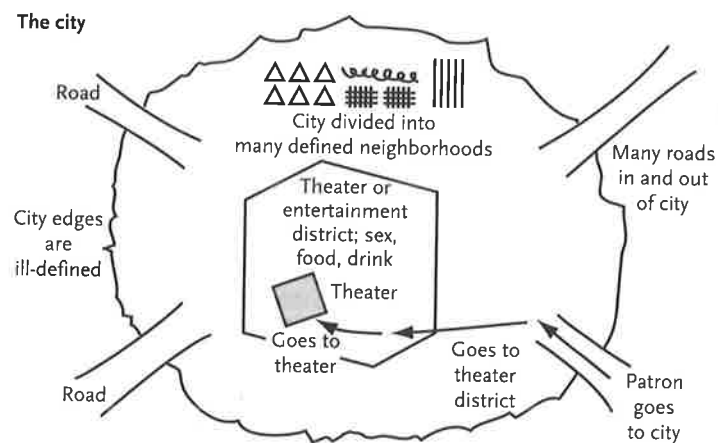


Figure 5.4 The Athenian theater

Note

Nested at the center of the Athenian theater was the open eye of the Altar of Dionysus. Around it danced the Chorus, giving a core of solidarity for the agonistic actions of the actors. The audience nested both Chorus and actors. But the agon of the contest among poets and actors for the prizes surrounded the whole theatrical event. Yet the solidarity of Athens, the polis, provided the ultimate nest for the entire sequence of performances and contests. Each agon was literally held in a nest of solidarity. The outer nest – the polis – was not metaphorical: there were definite geographical, ideological, and social limits to Athens; and each person knew what it was to be a citizen. The shape of the theater was a version of the social system which alternated agon and solidarity; it was open to debate and interrogation, but closed about who was or was not a member, a citizen.



The theater

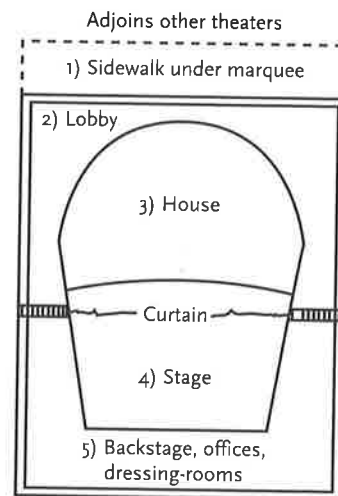


Figure 5.5 The proscenium theater

Note

The modern theater building is not in itself a central structure at the heart of a clearly bounded polis. That structure – if it exists at all – is the stadium or Superdome. Theaters are built in “theater districts,” one neighborhood in a rather ill-defined “urban area.” The proscenium theater itself is divided into five areas: 1) sidewalk under marquee, 2) lobby, 3) house, 4) stage, and 5) backstage. Fixed seating points the audience toward the stage. The stage floor is open and often slightly raked, tilting the action toward the house. Stage machinery is hidden in the wings and flies, making quick scene changes possible. The lobby, which extends into the street under the theater marquee, is a gathering place for the audience before the performance and during intermissions.

they are sold. In a way the proscenium theater combines factory and store in one building but with clearly defined areas. The spaces occupied by the public – marquee area, lobby, and house – are gaudily decorated reflecting an ambition to appear “aristocratic” or “high-class.” The spaces occupied by the workers – stage and backstage – resemble industrial workspaces, functional, sparsely decorated, raw, and full of necessary equipment.

The house is divided into different classes of seats, some better than others, but even the cheap seats are individual units. (In older proscenium theaters the cheap seats were literally benches, only the rich were entitled to individual places.) The box seats are placed so that patrons sitting there can be seen by other spectators.⁷ Before the play begins a curtain conceals most of the stage facing the seats. However, even when this temporary barrier is lifted, patrons are no longer allowed on stage as they were during the Restoration, nor do they usually see the actual walls of the theater building. These are masked by flats or sets: false architectural elements depicting various scenes.

The stage is architecturally separated from the house by the proscenium arch, the proscenium theater’s most unique and dominating feature. The arch is actually a framed wall with its center portion removed so that literally the audience is in one room and looking into another. The wall separating the two rooms is only partially removed. The arch itself emphasizes this incomplete removal. As the proscenium theater developed from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries the forestage jutting into the house receded until it all but vanished, eliminating any sharing of space between the stage and house. The open-theater movement of the twentieth century has once again made the playing space part of the viewing space. This has been attempted in many variations – thrust stage, arena, environmental theater. In the proscenium theater the part of the stage visible to the audience is a surprisingly small portion of the area behind the proscenium. In the Greek theater almost every space was visible, as well as the city and countryside behind and around the theater. In the proscenium theater the wings, flies, dressing-rooms, offices, and storage bins are all concealed. The stage and backstage portions of the building usually occupy more than half the area of the theater, but from the house the stage looks much less spacious than the house. Flies and wings were

developed to facilitate quick changes of scenery – visual surprises. Additional storage space was necessary as productions involving bulky scenery were kept for future productions; dressing-rooms became more ornate as costumes and makeup increased in complexity. The stage space of the proscenium theater is an efficient engine for quick scene changes and mounting sumptuous effects; this theater produces “numbers” and *coups de théâtre* like a many-course meal at an expensive restaurant. Usually every attempt is made to hide how effects are achieved. Dramas written for the proscenium usually include one or two intermissions because it’s necessary for patrons to see each other, evaluate the product they’ve purchased, drink, smoke, and re-experience the thrill and surprise of the rising curtain.

Theaters are located in a theater district; performances are offered at the edge of workdays, “after work” or on weekends and general holidays: theater is a place to go when work is finished, it is not meant to be a rival of work. Because it is a model of the mercantile process, and a product itself of the working middle-class, the modern theater can’t impede that process. Nor is it proper for the theater to entice patrons from their jobs (except on Wednesday afternoons, *matinées* traditionally reserved for blue-haired non-working ladies). Movies and baseball are different: they are offered as alternatives to work, though night ball is the accommodation of the big leagues to the workday. The theater district – often also a sex and restaurant district – stimulates consumer appetites by offering a series of shows just as each show offers a sequence of scenes. Competition is fierce among theaters – this competition is for customers not prizes; when prizes are given they are used to attract more customers. Regardless of their artistic quality, most shows fail (which means they don’t attract buyers), but hits run as long as people will pay to see them. Thus, in all these ways, the proscenium theater is a model of capitalism. Today, as capitalism evolves into corporatism, new kinds of theater arise. Cultural centers and regional theaters – art fortresses run by impresarios overseen by boards of directors – are examples of corporatism. Environmental theaters – built in cheap hit-and-run spaces, often in out-of-the-way neighborhoods – exemplify a resistance and alternative to the conglomerates. But environmental theaters exist only in the creases of contemporary society, living off the leavings, like cockroaches.

Creases are not marginal, on the edge, but liminal, in between. They run through the actual and conceptual centers of society, like faults in the Earth's crust. Creases are places to hide, but more importantly they signal areas of instability, disturbance, and potentially radical changes in the social topography. These changes are always "changes in direction," that is, changes of something more than technique. In the urban environment, in places abandoned, or not yet reclaimed, individuals and small groups can still work. Even in large, apparently smooth operations like corporations and universities, creases exist; look for them, quite literally, in "out of the way places." Crease phenomena do not transform existing neighborhoods instantly, as when bulldozers herald the erection of a new cultural center whose monuments rest on murdered neighborhoods, but step by step through infiltration and renovation. At the time when a balance/tension exists between several classes, income levels, interests, and uses – as was the case in the 1960s and 1970s in New York's SoHo district – crease phenomena – experimental art, bars, cafés, and clubs, lively street performances, parties where artists congregate – peak. But when a threshold of visibility and "stability" is crossed, the neighborhood freezes in a new form, becomes an "attraction" (like the theater district which draws most of its life from outside its own precinct) and the crease is smoothed out. Then artists – and others who need a crease environment – follow along, or create, a new fault.

Theaters everywhere are scenographic models of sociometric process. Pointing out that "most of the traditional theater performances [of India] are open-air events, organized on the level ground, a platform stage, or as a mobile processional spectacle," Suresh Awasthi goes on to say:

They are presented in fields after the harvest, streets, open spaces, outside town (often permanently designated for performances), fairs, markets and – especially for the Ramayana and the Krishna legend shows – temple gardens, riverbanks, market squares, and courtyards. . . . The performances are social events not separated from the community activity. The actor is an active member of his community. He is also a farmer, a mechanic, a carpenter, a fruit vendor, a vegetable hawker. . . . An important factor that determines the nature of the

scenography in this theater is the nonrealistic and metaphysical treatment of time and place.

(Awasthi 1974: 36–8)

Traditional Indian theater is very like western medieval theater – and modern avant-garde or experimental theater. The performer often has a second or third occupation, but this does not mean that his skills as a performer are amateurish; far from it, a connection to a community may deepen all aspects of his art. The flexible treatment of time and space – the ability of one space to be transformed into many places through the skills of the performer more than through the illusionistic devices of the scenographer – goes hand in hand with a transformational view of character (role doubling, role switching) and a close contact with the audience (the performer both as character and as story-teller, the use of such devices as the aside and direct address to the audience). This connectedness – a mobility among spheres of reality rather than social mobility in the modern sense – is an important quality of traditional performances, and even the avant-garde. This kind of total theater is nowhere better expressed than among the Aborigines:

The daily life of the Aborigines is rewarding but routine. There is a kind of low-key pace to the everyday round of living. In their ritual lives, however, the Aborigines attain a heightened sense of drama. Sharp images appear and colors deepen. The Aborigines are masters of stagecraft and achieve remarkable visual and musical effects with the limited materials at hand. . . . Gradually I experienced the central truth of Aboriginal religion: that it is not a thing by itself but an inseparable part of a whole that encompasses every aspect of daily life, every individual and ever time – past, present and future. It is nothing less than the theme of existence, and as such constitutes one of the most sophisticated and unique religious and philosophical systems known to man.

(Gould 1969: 103–4)⁸

We are accustomed to a theater that locates "the real" in relationships among individual people; but most of world theater takes a broader,

and deeper, view of what's real. Modern western theater is mimetic. Traditional theater, and again I include the avant-garde in this category, is *transformational*, creating or incarnating in a theater place what cannot take place anywhere else. Just as a farm is a field where edible foods are grown, so a theater is a place where transformations of time, place, and persons (human and non-human) are accomplished. Aborigine scenography creates theater out of a combination of natural and built elements. Each rock, waterhole, tree, and stream is embedded in a matrix of legend and dramatic action. Thus a particular place is where a ceremony takes place, where a mythic event has happened in the past, where beings manifest themselves through songs and dances, and where everyday and special actions converge – for example, a waterhole is both a place where people come to drink and where ceremonies are enacted. Simple modifications of space transform the drinking place (or some other multiple-use space) into a theater: clearing the area of small rocks, doing sand or rock paintings, for example; or a space may become a theater by being “learned” – a novice is taught the legends, songs, and dances associated with a particular place: geography itself is socialized; the uninitiated see nothing but an outcropping of rock or a waterhole; while the initiated experience a dense theatrical setting. This technique of creating a theater place by poetic means is used by Shakespeare and the makers of guerrilla theater alike.

TRANSFORMANCES

Victor Turner (1974) analyzes “social dramas” using theatrical terminology to describe how disharmonic or crisis situations are dealt with. These situations – arguments, combats, rites of passage – are inherently dramatic because participants not only do things, they show themselves and others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a reflexive and performed-for-an-audience aspect. Erving Goffman (1959) is as direct as Turner in using the theatrical paradigm. Goffman believes all social interactions are staged – people prepare their social roles (various personae or masks, different techniques of role playing) “backstage” and then enter the “main stage” areas in order to play out key social interactions and routines. For both Turner and Goffman the basic human plot is the same: someone or some group begins to move to a

new place in the social order; this move is acceded to or blocked; in either case a crisis occurs because any change in status involves a readjustment of the entire scheme; this readjustment is effected performatively – that is, by means of theater and ritual. Turner writes:

Social dramas are units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations. Typically, they have four main phases of public action. . . . These are: 1. *Breach* of regular, norm-governed social relations. . . . 2. *Crisis* during which . . . there is a tendency for the breach to widen. . . . Each public crisis has what I now call liminal characteristics, since it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary, it takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. . . . 3. *Redressive action* [ranging] from personal advice and informal meditation or arbitration to formal judicial and legal machinery and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes or resolution, to the performance of public ritual. . . . Redress, too, has its liminal features, its being “betwixt and between,” and, as such, furnishes a distanced replication and critique of the events leading up to and composing the “crisis.” This replication may be in the rational idiom of a judicial process, or in the metaphorical and symbolic idiom of a ritual process. . . . 4. The final phase. . . . consists either of the *reintegration* of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between contesting parties.

(Turner 1974: 37–41)

This way of growing by means of conflict and schism Bateson calls “schismogenesis” (1958: 171–97). It is a major agency of human cultural growth.

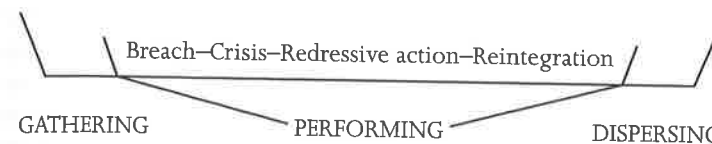
Turner's dramatic approach is interesting on many levels. The replication of the redressive action phase is, of course, a theatrical performance, a formal restaging of events. The four-phase process as a whole is a drama in the Euro-American tradition – this scheme can be discerned in Greek tragedies, Shakespearean plays, or the dramas of Ibsen or O'Neill. It is less easy to find in Chekhov, Ionesco, or Beckett – but it is

there; the way it is distorted gives an insight into dramatic structure. For example, in *Waiting for Godot* there is breach (the separation from Godot) and crises (waiting, the arrival of the Boy at the end of each act to tell Gogo and Didi that Godot will not come). There is a negative but extended redressive action: the doing of various bits of "nothing" – talk that has no effect on the dramatic action, vaudeville routines that fill up time but achieve nothing: these routines emphasize all that the characters can (not) do. But in *Godot* there's no reintegration, nor is there a schism. The play simply stops and if any future is suggested it simply continues the present indefinitely. Significantly the play ends with stage direction "They do not move." Most other dramas, the plays of Shakespeare and Ibsen, for example, end either with a journey – to get crowned, to go to the grave to dispose of corpses, to go to the authorities to relate what's happened – or with some reintegrative gesture such as Tesman's determination, at the close of *Hedda Gabler*, to reconstruct Lövborg's manuscript. Life literally "goes on." This movement which ends so many dramas is akin to the *Ita, missa est* which concludes the Mass: it is a dismissal of the audience, a signal within the drama itself that the theatrical event is coming to a close, that the spectators must prepare to move on. The audience disperses, spreading the news (good or bad) of the show. Even a play as non-conventional and non-religious as *Mother Courage and Her Children* follows this nearly universal pattern. The play climaxes in scene 11 with the murder of Katrin, Courage's last child. The next and final scene shows Courage, by means of the lullaby and funeral arrangements, taking leave of her daughter. The play's tag – comparable to the final couplets of Shakespearean drama – is Courage's shout as she hitches herself to her wagon, "I've got to get back into business. Hey, take me with you!" The last action of the play is Courage marching off, on the move again. The song is the same as that which started the play, but played at a slower tempo: is this stubborn determination or tragic stupidity? Whatever the meaning of the last sight and sound – and meanings will vary according to different *mises-en-scène* – the action is clear: Courage is on the road, walking and working.

Turner further asserts that the liminal phases of the rites of tribal, agrarian, hunting, and traditional societies are analogous to the artworks and leisure activities of industrial and post-industrial societies.

These Turner (1982, 1985) calls "liminoid," meaning they are like liminal rites but not identical to them. Basically liminal rites are obligatory while liminoid arts and entertainments are voluntary. However, the question remains: is Turner's four-phase pattern of breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration (or schism) actually a theatrical universal – or is it an imposition of a western concept? Turner shows how the social process of the Ndembu of Uganda conforms to this dramatic paradigm. I could show how Aborigine, Papua New Guinea, and Indian theater also conform. But what is the cost of this conformity? As Clifford Geertz notes, "the drama analogy . . . can expose some of the profoundest features of social process, but at the expense of making vividly disparate matters look drably homogeneous" (1980a: 173).

I want to go beyond what may be, after all, just an elaborate tautology. The basic performance structure of gathering/performing/dispersing underlies and literally contains, the dramatic structure:



The bottom line is solidarity, not conflict. Conflict is supportable (in the theater, and perhaps in society too) only inside a nest built from the agreement to gather at a specific time and place, to perform – to do something agreed on – and to disperse once the performance is over. The extreme forms of violence that characterize drama can be played out only inside this nest. When people "go to the theater" they are acknowledging that theater takes place at special times in special places. Surrounding a show are special observances, practices, and rituals that lead into the performance and away from it. Not only getting to the theater district, but entering the building itself involves ceremony: ticket-taking, passing through gates, performing rituals, finding a place from which to watch: all this – and the procedures vary from culture to culture, event to event – frames and defines the performance. Ending the show and going away also involves ceremony: applause or some formal way to conclude the performance and wipe away the reality of

the show re-establishing in its place the reality of everyday life. The performers even more than the audience prepare and then, when the show is over, undertake "cooling-off" procedures. In many cultures this cooling off involves rituals to retire props or costumes or to assist performers out of trance or other non-ordinary states of being. Too little study has been made of how people – both spectators and performers – approach and leave performances. How do specific audiences get to, and into, the performance space; how do they go from that space? In what ways are gathering/dispersing related to preparation/cooling off?

The "theatrical frame" allows spectators to enjoy deep feelings without feeling compelled either to intervene or to avoid witnessing the actions that arouse those feelings. A spectator better not prevent the murders occurring in *Hamlet*. Yet these stage murders are not "less real" but "differently real" than what happens in everyday life. Theater, to be effective, must maintain its double or incomplete presence, as a *here-and-now performance of there-and-then events*. The gap between "here and now" and "there and then" allows an audience to contemplate the action, and to entertain alternatives. Theater is the art of enacting only one of a range of virtual alternatives. It is a luxury unaffordable in ordinary life. Oedipus would be much different if there were a plague afflicting the town where the drama was being played and the audience believed the plague would end if the murderer of their former mayor – a murderer they knew to be concealed in their midst – was found and brought to judgement here and now.

Some people want performance to achieve this level of actuality. As theater approaches this limit it changes fundamentally: small real actions are substituted for big fictional semblances. A female has her body scarred or a male is circumcised. These "real actions" are themselves emblems or symbols. But when the theatrical frame is imposed strongly it permits the enactment of "aesthetic dramas," shows whose actions, like Oedipus poking out his own eyes, are extreme but recognized by everyone, including the performers, as a "playing with" rather than a "real doing of." This "playing with" is not weak or false, it causes changes to both performers and spectators.

People who want to make "everything real," including killing animals, the "art" of self-mutilation, or "snuff films" where people are

actually murdered,¹⁰ are deceiving themselves if they think they are approaching a deeper or more essential reality. All of these actions – like the Roman gladiatorial games or Aztec human sacrifices – are as symbolic and make-believe as anything else on stage. What happens is that living beings are reified into symbolic agents. Such reification is monstrous, I condemn it without exception. It is no justification to point out that modern warfare does the same, killing "things" at a distance. Nor will these blood performances act as a cathartic: violence replicated, or actualized, stimulates more violence. It also deadens people's abilities to intervene outside the theater when they see violence being done.

Turner locates the essential drama in conflict and conflict resolution. I locate it in *transformation* – in how people use theater as a way to experiment with, act out, and ratify change. Transformations in theater occur in three different places, and at three different levels: 1) in the drama, that is, in the story;¹¹ 2) in the performers whose special task it is to undergo a temporary *rearrangement of their body/mind*, what I call a "transportation" (Schechner 1985: 117–51); 3) in the audience where changes may either be temporary (entertainment) or permanent (ritual). All over the world performances are accompanied by eating and drinking. In New Guinea, Australia, and Africa feasting is at the very center of theater; in modern western theater a show without something to eat or drink at intermission or just before or after the theater is unusual. This action recalls not only the chimpanzee carnivals but the hunting circuit; it suggests that theater stimulates appetites, that it is an oral/visceral art (see Kaplan 1968). And, as Lévi-Strauss has shown, the basic transformation from raw to cooked is a paradigm of culture-making: the making of the natural into the human.¹² At its deepest level this is what theater is "about," the ability to frame and control, to transform the raw into the cooked, to deal with the most problematic (violent, dangerous, sexual, taboo) human interactions.

At all levels theater includes mechanisms for transformation. At the level of the staging there are costumes and masks, exercises and incantations, incense and music, all designed to "make believe" in the literal sense – to help the performer make her/himself into another person or being, existing at another time in another place, and to manifest this presence here and now, in this theater, so that time and place are at least

doubled. If the transformation works, individual spectators will experience changes in mood and/or consciousness; these changes are usually temporary but sometimes they can be permanent. In some kinds of performance – rites of passage, for example – a permanent change in the status of the participants is accomplished. But all these changes are in the service of social homeostasis. Changes affecting individuals or groups help maintain the balance of the whole system. For example, it's necessary to change girls into women (in an initiation rite) because somewhere else within the system women are being changed into dead people (in funeral rites); a vacancy exists that must be filled. These vacancies don't occur on a simple one-to-one basis, but according to system-wide probabilities. It is less easy to see how this works in an aesthetic drama, say a performance of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

The key difference between social and aesthetic dramas is the performance of the transformations effected. Some kinds of social drama such as feuds, trials, and wars effect permanent change. In other kinds of performance which share qualities both of social and aesthetic drama – rites of passage, political ceremonies – changes in status are permanent (or at least cannot be undone except through more ritual) while changes in the body are either temporary – the wearing of some costume – or not severe: piercing an ear or septum, circumcision. The ordeals which are features of initiation rites, though extreme relative to ordinary experience are temporary. But the idea of these body markings, alterations, and ordeals is to signal and/or mark and enforce a permanent change in the participants. In aesthetic drama no permanent body change is effected. A gap is intentionally opened between what happens to the figures in the story and what happens to the performers playing that story. To play a person in love, or someone who murders or is murdered (common enough in western theater), or to be transformed into a god, or to go into a trance (common enough in non-western theater) involves fundamental, if temporary, transformations of being, not mere appearance.

Aesthetic drama works its transformations on the audience. In aesthetic drama the audience is separated both actually and conceptually from the performers. This separateness of the audience is the hallmark of aesthetic drama. In social drama all present are participants, though

some are more decisively involved than others. In aesthetic drama everyone in the theater is a participant in the performance while only those playing roles in the drama are participants in the drama nested within the performance (see chapter 3). The performance as distinct from the drama is social, and it is at the level of performance that aesthetic and social drama converge. The function of aesthetic drama is to do for the consciousness of the audience what social drama does for its participants: providing a place for, and means of, transformation. Rituals carry participants across limens, transforming them into different persons. For example a young man is a "bachelor" and through the ceremony of marriage he becomes a "husband." His status during that ceremony, but only then, is that of "groom." Groom is the liminal role he plays while transforming from bachelor into husband. Aesthetic drama compels a transformation of the spectators' view of the world by rubbing their senses against enactments of extreme events, much more extreme than they would usually witness. The nesting pattern makes it possible for the spectator to reflect on these events rather than flee from them or intervene in them. That reflection is the liminal time during which the transformation of consciousness takes place.

The situation for the actor in aesthetic drama is complicated because the drama is repeated many times and each time the actor is supposed to start from nearly the same place. In other words, in western theater at least, although spectators come and go, and they are encouraged to change, techniques have been developed to prepare actors for, and bring them down from, the experience of playing relatively unchanged – no more changed than any ordinary career changes a person. Metaphorically speaking, the actor is a circular printing press who, in rolling over makes an impression on her audience; but she is not ready to roll over again until she is back in her original position. For each performance there is a new audience on whom an impression is to be made. The actor makes a journey that ends where it began, while the audience is "moved" to a new place. In aesthetic drama techniques have been developed to transform the actor into the role and other techniques are used to bring her back to her ordinary self. In some ritual theater the officiators are very like actors in aesthetic drama: the shaman working a cure must effect change in the patient, and often does this by transforming into another being; but at the end of the

performance the shaman must return to her/his ordinary existence. It is the ability to "get into" and "get back from" that makes the shaman a continually useful person, not a person to be used once only. Thus there are at least three categories of performance: 1) aesthetic, where the audience changes consciousness while the performer "rolls over"; 2) ritual, where the subject of the ceremony is transformed while the officiating performer "rolls over"; 3) social drama, where all involved change (see Schechner 1985: 117-50).

The ambiguity of theater since 1960 regarding whether or not an event is "really happening" is an outcome of the blurring of the boundaries between the categories of performance. Television has made it possible to theatricalize experience by editing even the most intimate or horrendous events into "news" so that people feel nothing strange about a complementary actualization of art (see Schechner 1985: 295-324). The boundaries between "art" and "life" are blurry and permeable. When people watch extreme events knowing these are 1) actually happening and 2) edited to make the events both more dramatic and more palatable, fitting them into a "showtime" format, but also knowing 3) that as observers they are stripped of all possibility of intervention – that is, they are turned into an audience in the formal sense – the reaction of anger quickly dissolves into paralysis and despair, or indifference. Maybe appetites are aroused, but these can't be satisfied except by going on the shopping sprees the commercials insist are necessary for happiness. Emotional feedback is not possible while watching TV. TV is not a two-way communications system as live theater is. Some people react by making and/or enjoying art that's more "real," introducing into aesthetics the interventions and feedback eliminated from ordinary life.

Thus it is no longer strange in theater or performance art to involve the audience directly in the story, to stage actual encounters among people, and to use theatrical events as the first step in a process of religious retreats and meetings (as Grotowski did). These are attempts to regain some balance between information – which today overwhelms people – and action, which seems more and more difficult to effect. Terrorism, as opposed to ordinary street violence, is a way of getting the attention of society, of making a show; it is a symptom of the basic dysfunction of the communication-feedback-consequent

action process. The actualization of art – the existence of theater combining the social with the aesthetic – is traditional in many parts of the world. Thus avant-garde and political theater find already prepared paths.

I have tried in my work with The Performance Group and since, and in my teaching, to place the actuality of performances in the immediate theatrical event I am staging. I emphasize the gathering and dispersing aspects of performance. Upon entering the theater spectators are greeted, either by me or by the actors. Spectators see the performance being prepared – actors getting into costume, musicians tuning up, technical equipment checked, etc. Intermissions, and less formal breaks in the narration such as scene shifts, are underlined. In *Mother Courage* a full meal was served during intermission – during this break in the narration the performance was carried on by other means, by mingling performers and audience, by encouraging spectators to use parts of the space otherwise and at other times reserved for the performers (see chapter 4). I try to establish non-story-telling time as an integral part of the whole performance scheme, while clearly separating this time from the drama. When the drama is over I speak to spectators as they are leaving. I direct many of them to where the performers are so that the experience ends not with a dramatic moment, or even the curtain call, but with discussions, greetings, and leave-takings.

The history of intermissions in the western theater is an interesting example of the importance of the underlying social event as a nest for the theatrical event. When performances were staged outdoors (Greek, medieval, Elizabethan) the spectators could see each other in daylight. The court performances of masques and dramas in the Renaissance were so lit that spectators could see each other as well as the actors. This kind of general illumination, and a mixing of focus including spectators as well as actors, continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But as scene changes began to necessitate complicated machinery which producers wanted to mask from the audience, the front curtain was introduced and step by step the forestage was eliminated. Also changes in lighting, especially the introduction first of gas and then electricity in the nineteenth century, widened the gap between stage and house until the stage was brightly lit and the house

dark. In this situation naturalism arose, with its slice-of-life and peeping-Tom staging. Along with these conventions came the intermission: a formal period when the house was illuminated and the spectators, either remaining in the house or tramping to lounges and restaurants, had the opportunity to see and mingle with each other. The intermission served a purpose, not necessary either in outdoor or fully lit theaters: that of giving the spectators a chance to see themselves. Intermission confirms the existence of the "gathering," a group assembled specifically to attend this particular theatrical event. Why don't movies have intermissions? Because movies lack a group of live entertainers on stage, they are barely social at all. Sporting events are social, and feature intermissions (halftime, seventh-inning stretch, a card of bouts or races). Performances which keep the audience in the dark with no intermission generate anxiety and contradict the social impulses of theater. I do not condemn such performances, but note that they run against the grain of the western tradition; in the deepest sense they are unconventional.

My directing is intended to show the audience that "a story is being played for you, all around you, needing your active support." These techniques emphasize the "performance nest" inside which the drama happens. Performers in The Performance Group were trained to display their double identities: as themselves and as the characters they were playing. By keeping these both out front spectators see performers not only acting but choosing to act. Even "being in character" is seen as a choice not an inevitability. Thus the spectator, too, is encouraged to choose how to receive each action. There is no fixed seating, several actions go on simultaneously – spectators can shift focus from one aspect of the performance to another. By no means are all these aspects concerned with the drama: a spectator can focus on a performer changing costume (that is, becoming another character), the technical crew, other spectators, etc. Instead of working for a unanimity of reaction, as in orthodox theater, I strive for a diversity of opportunities. These encourage spectators to react intellectually and ideologically as well as emotionally. What is "really happening" is a gathering of spectators of different ages, sexes, classes, and ideologies watching a group of performers tell a story by theatrical means. Within this context The Performance Group explored the most radical theatrical means we could

handle: audience participation, environmental staging, multi-focus, etc. These were combined with the traditional theatrical means of our culture: narration and characterization.

WHAT PERFORMERS DO: THE ECSTASY/TRANCE WHEEL

Looking at performing worldwide, two processes are identifiable. A performer is either "subtracted," achieving transparency, eliminating "from the creative process the resistance and obstacles caused by one's own organism" (Grotowski 1968a: 178); or s/he is "added to," becoming more or other than s/he is when not performing. S/he is "doubled," to use Artaud's word. The first technique, that of the shaman, is ecstasy; the second, that of the Balinese dancer, is trance. In the west we have terms for these two kinds of acting: the actor in ecstasy is Ryszard Cieslak in *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski's "holy actor"; the actor in trance possessed by another, is Konstantin Stanislavsky as Vershinin, the "character actor."

To be in trance is not to be out of control or unconscious. The Balinese say that if a trance dancer hurts himself the trance was not genuine. In some kinds of trance the possessed and the possessor are both visible. Jane Belo describes a Balinese horse dance where

the player would start out riding the hobbyhorse, being, so to speak, the horseman. But in his trance activity he would soon become identified with the horse – he would prance, gallop about, stamp and kick as a horse – or perhaps it would be fairer to say that he would be the horse and rider in one. For though he would sit on the hobbyhorse, his legs had to serve from the beginning as the legs of the beast.

(Belo 1960: 213)

This is the centaur; and it is an example of the performer's double identity. When, in western theater, we speak of an actor "portraying a role," using a metaphor from painting where the artist studies a subject and produces an image of that subject, we slide away from the main fact of theatrical performance: that the "portrayal" is a transformation of the performer's body/mind – the "canvas" or "material" is the performer. Interviewing Balinese performers of *sanghyang*s, village trance

performances, Goesti Made Soemeng (GM), a Balinese member of Belo's research team, probed the way trance possession happens:

GM: What is your feeling when you are first smoked?¹³

Darja: Somehow or other suddenly I lose consciousness. The people singing I hear. If people call out, calling me "Tjittah!" [a pig call] like that, I hear it too. If people talk of other things, I don't hear it.

GM: When you are a sanghyang pig, and people insult you, do you hear it?

Darja: I hear it. If anyone insults me I am furious.

GM: When you finish playing, how do you feel, tired or not?

Darja: When it's just over, I don't feel tired yet. But the next day or the day after that, my body is sick . . .

GM: When you become a sanghyang snake, what is the feeling like, and where do you feel your body to be?

Darma: When I'm a sanghyang snake, suddenly my thoughts are delicious. Thus, my feelings being delicious suddenly I see something like forest, woods, with many many trees. When my body is like that, as a snake, my feeling is of going through the woods, and I am pleased . . .

GM: And if you're a sanghyang puppy, what does your body feel like? Where do you feel yourself to be?

Darja: I just feel like a puppy. I feel happy to run along the ground. I am very pleased, just like a puppy running on the ground. As long as I can run on the ground, I'm happy.

GM: And if you're a sanghyang potato, where do you feel yourself to be, and like what?

Darma: I feel I am in the garden, like a potato planted in the garden.

GM: And if you're a sanghyang broom, what's it like, and where do you feel?

Darma: Like sweeping filth in the middle of the ground. Like sweeping filth in the street, in the village. I feel I am being carried off by the broom, led on to sweep.

(Belo 1960: 222)

Belo notes that "a considerable crowd had to be present to insure that the trancer did not get out of hand." She tells of the time when a man

playing a pig escaped from the courtyard. He was not caught until the next morning. "He had by that time ravaged the gardens, trampled and eaten the plants, which was not good for the village. He had also, being a pig, eaten large quantities of excreta he had found in the roadways, which was not good for him" (Belo 1960: 202).

Belo finds these accounts "surprisingly satisfactory," and I do too. They show that trance performing is a kind of character acting: being possessed by another = becoming another. Eliade says that shamans, too, are often possessed by animals.

During seances among the Yakut, the Yukagir, the Chukchee, the Goldi, the Eskimo and others, wild animal cries and bird calls are heard. Castagne describes the Kirgiz-Tartar *baqca* running around the tent, springing, roaring, leaping; he "barks like a dog, sniffs at the audience, lows like an ox, bellows, cries, bleats like a lamb, grunts like a pig, whinnies, coos, imitating with remarkable accuracy the cries of animals, the songs of birds, the sound of their flight and so on, all of which greatly impresses his audience." The "descent of the spirits" often takes place in this fashion.

(Eliade 1970: 97)¹⁴

And, as I noted in chapter 4, this kind of performing associated with trickster figures and hunters arose very early in human history (see La Barre 1972: 195–6).

Balinese trance, shamanic possession, and the trickster are not examples of acting from the Stanislavsky tradition. But nor are they essentially different. Stanislavsky developed exercises – sense memory, emotional recall, playing the through-line of action, etc. – so that actors could "get inside of" and act "as if" they were other people. Stanislavsky's approach is humanist and psychological, but still a version of the ancient technique of performing by becoming or being possessed by another.

Belo (1960: 223) says that the pleasure of the "trance experience is connected with the surrendering of the self-impulse. . . . Being a pig, a toad, a snake, or a creepy spirit are all enactments of the feeling of lowness in a very literal, childish and direct manner." She thinks that "urge to be low" is one of the foundations of trance.¹⁵ To be low is to

take the physical perspective of a child. To be filthy – playing with excrement and mud – is a regression to infantile behavior. It opens a channel to farce – and farce is probably more ancient than tragedy.¹⁶ Finally, to be low is to escape from rigid mores – being low is a way to be free.

But these phenomena are only half of the dialectic of performing. The other half is ecstasy: a soaring away from the body, an emptying of the body. Eliade:

The shamanic costume tends to give the shaman a new, magical body in animal form. The three chief types are that of the bird, the reindeer (stag) and the bear – but especially the bird. . . . Feathers are mentioned more or less everywhere in the descriptions of shamanic costumes. More significantly, the very structure of the costumes seeks to imitate as faithfully as possible the shape of a bird. . . . Siberian, Eskimo and North American shamans fly. All over the world the same magical power is credited to sorcerers and medicine men. . . . An adequate analysis of the symbolism of magical flight would lead us too far. We will simply observe that two important mythical motifs have contributed to give it its present structure: the mythical image of the soul in the form of a bird and the idea of birds as psychopomps.

(Eliade 1970: 156, 477–9)

Aborigine “Dreamtime” songs and dances are examples of this kind of performing. A person, often in sleep but sometimes wide-awake, is transported to the original “timeless mythical past during which totemic beings traveled from place to place across the desert performing creative acts” (Gould 1969: 105). Some of these beings are natural species such as kangaroo and emu, some are special beings like Wati Jutjars (the Two Men) and Wanampi (the Water Snake). “Although they lived in the past, the dreamtime beings are still thought of as being alive and exerting influence over present-day people” (Gould 1969: 106). Performances are passed on down the generations. When new material is added it is learned by “dreaming”: a man participates with the mythical beings in their ceremonies, then he teaches his comrades what he has learned. Aborigine performances are staged with extreme care, especially regarding scenography, body decorations, and the execution of song and dance routines. This care is not a matter of beauty in

our sense – smoothness, efficiency – but of making sure that all the prescribed steps are taken in proper order. Propriety is more important than artistry in the Euro-American sense. If the material is new every care is taken that it is learned exactly and passed on intact.

During his poor theater phase (1959–68) Grotowski followed a procedure close to that of the Aborigines. But instead of seeking material in the Dreamtime (archeology, history), Grotowski’s performers sought it in their own experiences.

In our opinion, the conditions essential to the art of acting are the following, and should be made the object of a methodical investigation:

(a) To stimulate a process of self-revelation, going back as far as the subconscious, yet canalizing this stimulus in order to obtain the required reaction.

(b) To be able to articulate this process, discipline it, and convert it into signs. In concrete terms, this means to construct a score whose notes are tiny elements of contact, reactions to the stimuli of the outside world: what we call “give and take.”

(c) To eliminate from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one’s own organism, both physical and psychical (the two forming a whole).

(Grotowski 1968a: 128)

Using this method Grotowski composed “gesticulatory ideograms” comparable to the signs of medieval European theater, Peking Opera, ballet, and other highly codified forms. But Grotowski’s ideograms were “immediate and spontaneous . . . a living from possessing its own logic” (1968a: 142). This was because his actors were transparent: they were able to let impulses pass through them so that their gestures were at one and the same time intimate and impersonal. Grotowski, his scenographers, and the performers of *Dr Faustus*, *Akropolis*, *The Constant Prince*, and *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* (first version) achieved a total iconography of body, voice, group composition, and scenic architecture. The totality was so complete that western audiences felt uncomfortable: even Oriental performances as tightly structured as *noh* or *kathakali* allow open spaces for audience inattention. The productions

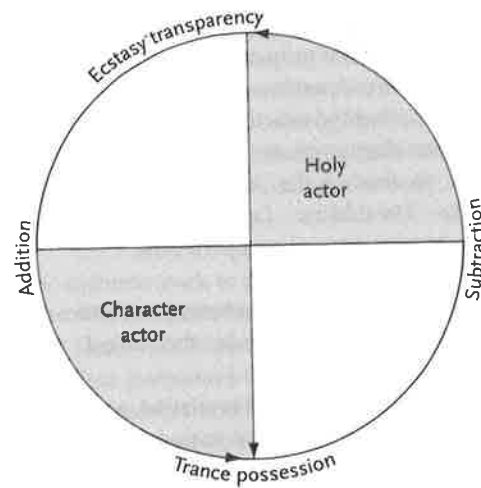


Figure 5.6

Note

The ecstatic flight of the shaman leaves the body empty and transparent: absolutely vulnerable. Cieslak travels by means of *subtraction* toward ecstasy when he plays the Prince in *The Constant Prince*. The trance dancers of Bali are possessed or "taken over" by whomever or whatever possesses them. Olivier travels by means of *addition* toward possession; he systematically converts the "as if" of his Hamlet into a "becoming of" Hamlet. Those techniques of performer training which begin with a movement toward ecstasy – psychophysical exercises, yoga, etc. – help the performer "follow impulses," that is, yield and become transparent. In this state a performer may suddenly "drop into" his role because the vulnerability of ecstasy can be suddenly transformed into the totality of trance possession.

of the Polish Laboratory Theater were totally without "noise." Such clarity of signal evoked anxiety as well as pleasure.

No performing is "pure" ecstasy or trance. Always there is a *shifting*, dialectical tension between the two (figure 5.6).

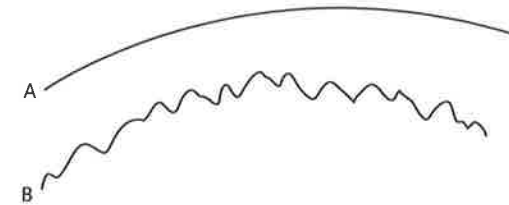
REHEARSAL PROCEDURES

Every aspect of gathering/performing/dispersing needs careful examination both from the point of view of the performers and that of the

spectators. In expanding our knowledge beyond drama to performing and beyond performing to the whole performance process much will be learned not only about art-making (for theater, as Alexander Alland pointed out to me, is the only art where the creative process is by necessity visible) but also about social life because theater is both intentionally and non-consciously a paradigm of culture and culture-making. In this concluding section I will look briefly at a decisive aspect of the large problem: what rehearsal is. I think I will be able to show that the essential ritual action of theater takes place during rehearsals.

At the 1957 Macy Foundation Conference on Group Processes Ray Birdwhistell explained the following model:

We have been running trajectories on dancing and other acts described as graceful behavior.



Note B and A are trajectories of an arm or leg or body. A is a smooth curve; B is the zigzag line. The sizes of these zigzags are unimportant. It is the shape of the movement with which I am concerned. A and B express the same trajectory. However, ultimately trajectory A shows minimal variation or adjustment within the scope of the trajectory. In A there is a minimum of messages being reacted to in process. This is "grace." In B multiple messages are being introduced into the system and there is the zigzag. The things we call graceful are always multi-message acts in which the secondary messages are minimized, and there the role of the whole is maximized.

(Birdwhistell, in Lorenz 1959: 101–2)

Lorenz pointed out that:

with the elimination of the noise in the movement, when the movement becomes graceful, it becomes more unambiguous as a

signal. . . . The more pregnant and simple the movement is, the easier it is for it to be taken up unambiguously by the receptor. Therefore, there is a strong selection pressure working in the direction of making all signal movements, these releasing movements [Innate Release Mechanisms or learned gestalts], more and more graceful, and that is also what reminds us [in animal behavior] of a dance.

(Lorenz 1959: 202-3)

Grace = simplification = increasing the signal efficiency of a movement = a dance.

But some artworks, even performances, are notoriously complex, ambivalent, and "inefficient." Great masterpieces are not necessarily minimalist. The *Ramayana*, the Bible, the *Odyssey*, the plays of Shakespeare, the spectacles of Robert Wilson, the paintings of Brueghel, the sculptings at Konarak, etc. — are these less "graceful" (that is, less artistic) than the plays of Beckett, the paintings of Mondrian, or haiku poetry? Clearly a single, normative standard for "evaluating art" abolishes various cultural, historical, or evolutionary perspectives. The difficulty is solved by relocating the question of simplification (grace) from a comparison of finished works in their exhibition phase to works in the process of being made: the selection-of-what's-done-against-all-other-possibilities phase. It is not a matter of comparing one work to other works, or to the world. Important and revealing as such comparisons are they yield nothing concerning the issue Birdwhistell raises. One must fold each work back in on itself, comparing its completed state to the process of inventing it, to its own internal procedures during that time when it was not yet ready for showing. Although all arts have this phase, only performance requires it to be public, that is, acted out among the performers as rehearsal. Comparing a work to its own process of creation applies not only to single-authored works but to multi-authored works such as the Homeric epics, the Bible, medieval cathedrals, and all other projects that extend beyond a single person's attention or life-span. In these cases the process of making the work has an extra step, that of arriving at a "finished form" that cannot be known with certainty beforehand. This solidification may take many generations and be ratified historically in structures which, under different circumstances, may have turned out

differently. For example, Notre Dame in Paris has only one "finished" tower; but how "wrong" it would be to finish the "incomplete" structure. As an ideal cathedral the building lacks a tower; as Notre Dame it is complete only as it now stands. In all cases the process of solidification, completion, and historical ratification is a process of rehearsal: how a work is reworked until it crosses a threshold of "acceptability" after which it can be "shown."

The theater is unique in that all its works, even the most traditional, are produced by means of the rehearsal process. That is, all theatrical works change over time as they are adjusted to immediate circumstances. Sometimes these changes are tectonically slow when a dogma is fixed as, say, the Roman Catholic Mass is. But even the Mass has been suddenly readjusted, most recently by Vatican Council II. And, on the local level, the Mass is always accommodating the given circumstances of its various celebrations. In the aesthetic genres such as modern Euro-American theater delight is taken in reinterpreting the classics; but there are also unspoken limits — if a theater group goes beyond these it is not praised for being inventive but attacked for "violating" the material. Such was the reaction of some critics and spectators to The Performance Group's productions of *Dionysus in 69* (Euripides' *The Bacchae*) and *Makbeth* (Shakespeare's *Macbeth*). But even when doing a brand new play tensions arise between the author's intentions and what finally happens on the stage. This happened in TPG's production of Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* (see chapter 3). Sometimes, as in the famous disputes between Anton Chekhov and Stanislavsky, Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan, these tensions reach a breaking point.

But what exactly is the "rehearsal process"? At the Macy Conference W. Gray Walter commented on Birdwhistell's model:

Grace may be the result of efficiency in a goal-directed movement. In the case of an artificial animal or guided weapon, the early guided weapons and some modern ones, when they are searching and are not goal-directed, have a trajectory with a messy curve like B [203]. They perform a hunting movement, which looks quite random and is certainly not very graceful. It is jerky and disjointed, incoherent, often a series of cycloid loops. But the moment the goal or target is perceived,

the trajectory becomes a graceful parabola or hyperbola. So, the appearance of a goal will transform a graceless, and exploratory mode of behavior (which may have a high information potential in it, in the sense that it is looking in many directions) into one which has only one bit of information, if the target is there, but looks smooth and pretty.

(Walter, in Lorenz 1959: 202)

Early rehearsals, or workshops, are jerky and disjointed, often incoherent. The work is indeed a hunt, full of actions with "high information potential," but very low goal-orientation. Even in working on texted material this kind of "looking around" marks early rehearsals: actors try a variety of interpretations, designers bring in many sketches and models most of which are rejected, the director doesn't really know what s/he wants. And especially if the project is to develop its own text and actions the basic question of the early work is an anxiety-laden, "What are we doing?" If, by a certain time, a target is not visible (not only a production date but a vision of what is to be produced), the project falters, then fails. A director may maintain confidence by imposing order in the guise of set exercises; s/he may do this too soon and cut down the chances of discovering new actions. A balance is needed. Comparable processes occur in traditional societies. John Emigh writes about a rehearsal of a ceremony in a village on the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea:

As the rehearsal proceeded an old man would stop the singing from time to time to make suggestions on style or phrasing or, just as often, just as much a part of the event being rehearsed, he would comment on the meaning of the song words, on the details of the story. The rehearsal was at once remarkably informal and absolutely effective. A middle-aged woman with an extraordinary, searing voice seemed to be in control of the singing. She would start and stop at whim, repeating phrases, checking points with the old man, pausing to hear his explanation. . . . As the rehearsal proceeded, men and women would occasionally drift by. The assembled singers and drum beaters and witnesses practiced the movements of the dance to accompany the mother's lament.¹⁷

We are used to rehearsals for weddings, funerals, and other religious and civic ceremonies. In every case the rehearsal is a way of selecting from the possible actions those to be performed, of simplifying these, making them as clear as possible in regard both to the matrix from which they have been taken and the audience with which they are meant to communicate. Along with this primary task the secondary work of rehearsal is to have each performer perform her/his part with maximum clarity. Farce is interesting in this regard because it turns one kind of clarity on its head. Charlie Chaplin staggering drunkenly across the street is acting "messy" but with consummate skill – just as a clown performs a graceless pratfall gracefully. The signal sent reads "graceless" but this signal is sent clearly – i.e. gracefully. Audiences admire the ease with which great farceurs play at being clumsy. The same may be said about dissimulation of all kinds so popular in theater: lies, disguises, double plots, ironies. In every case the performer's problem is to be clear about the lie, to be convincing in both aspects of the situation so that an audience can see around the action and perceive it and its opposite, text and metatext, simultaneously.

Comparable to rehearsal, but not exactly identical to it, is preparation. The Aborigines spend many hours preparing for a ten-minute dance. They carefully lay out all the implements of the dance, they paint their bodies, they prepare the dancing area. Before each performance members of The Performance Group took two hours or more warming up their voices, doing psychophysical exercises, dance steps and yoga, reviewing difficult bits from the show, etc. The Moscow Art Theater was famous for the preparation period each actor practiced immediately before going onto the stage. Every performer I know goes through a routine before performing. These preparations literally "compose" the person and the group: they are a kinesic recapitulation of the rehearsal process allowing for a settling into the special tasks at hand, a concentration that shrinks the world to the dimensions of the theater. These preparations are the ritual frame surrounding, setting off, and protecting the time/space of the theater.

Both rehearsal and preparation employ the same means: repetition, simplification, exaggeration, rhythmic action, the transformation of "natural sequences" of behavior into "composed sequences." These means comprise the ritual process as understood by ethologists. Thus

it is in rehearsals/preparations that I detect the fundamental ritual of theater.

I find nothing disturbing about relating the finest achievements of human art – indeed, the very process of making art: the ritual actions of rehearsal and preparation – to animal behavior because I detect no break between animal and human behavior. And especially in the realm of artistic-ritual behavior I find homologies, continuities, and analogies. Activities thicken – get more complicated, dense, symbolic, contradictory, and multivocal – along a continuum of expanding consciousness. The human achievement – shared by a few primates and aquatic mammals but not elaborated by them – is the ability to make decisions based on virtual as well as actual alternatives. These virtual alternatives take on a life of their own. Theater is the art of actualizing them, and rehearsal is the means of developing their individual shapes and rhythms. By turning possibilities into action, into performances, whole worlds otherwise not lived are born. Theater doesn't arrive suddenly and stay fixed either in its cultural or individual manifestations. It is insinuated along a web of associations spun from play, games, hunting, slaughter and distribution of meat, ceremonial centers, trials, rites of passage, and story-telling. Rehearsals and recollections – preplay and afterplay – converge in the theatrical event.

NOTES

- 1 See Marshack (1972), Giedion (1962–4), and La Barre (1972).
- 2 Ucko and Rosenfeld (1967: 229) summarize thought on the subject: "The relative frequencies of animals, the absence of representations of vegetation, and also the evidence . . . which shows that many representations were intended to be viewed, suggest that 'theater' may well be behind some of the parietal representations." Although there are many disputes in the field of cave art, all authorities believe that performances of some kind (rites, theater, dance, music) took place in the caves. The antiquity, one can almost say the primacy, of performance is clear. For an extended investigation of these ideas, see Pfeiffer (1982).
- 3 See Brecht's "The Street Scene" in Brecht (1964: 121–9).
- 4 In England, the medieval cycle plays were staged on wagons which moved from site to site. The wagons were used as stages, backdrops, and dressing-rooms. The audience gathered around as the play moved from the wagons to the street, employing both the raised space of the wagons and the flat space of the

- street. Spectators stood in the street or looked from rooftops and windows of buildings surrounding the narrow roadways. Playing began at dawn and continued throughout the day. There must have been much coming and going among the spectators. This mixing of the social, the religious, and the aesthetic marks such contemporary performances as the ramlilas of north India (see Schechner 1985: 151–213).
- 5 I use the word "natural" to mean the kind of theater that happens in everyday life. There is no need to stage or (re)create it. When an accident happens or a dispute is played out in public, people will watch. The media, if alerted, will replay such "newsworthy" events. When something sumptuous passes by, people turn to watch, whether it be an ocean liner steaming down river or a head of state motorcading up an avenue.
 - 6 For extended discussions of a number of processional performances in different cultures, see *TDR, The Drama Review* 29 (3) (1985), a special issue edited by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Brooks McNamara.
 - 7 Box seats developed from earlier practices where VIPs sat onstage. When this was recognized as a disruption the theater could no longer tolerate, boxes came into fashion. It is interesting how in environmental theater the presence of everyone, or anyone, on stage – or in the same area where the players play – is a democratization of the presence on stage of the VIPs.
 - 8 See also E. T. Kirby (1972: 5–21).
 - 9 By "going to the theater" I mean something more than the Euro-American practice. I mean whatever arrangements are made so that a performance can occur: for example, adhering to a ritual calendar; preparing a special place or making an ordinary place such as a market square special; rehearsing; making sure that the necessary spectators are in attendance.
 - 10 The ultimate theater of violence (along with documentary movies of war, torture, and mayhem) are pornographic "snuff films." In these, someone is hired to make a porn movie but at the moment of climax the person is killed. The camera records the shock and agony of the victim and the actions of the murderer(s). The film is then exhibited for high admissions at private parties. Sometimes, it's said, the victim agrees for a handsome price to be killed. The comparison of snuff porn to Roman gladiatorial games is obvious, as is the decadence of both kinds of entertainment. As for the cathartic effect of viewing violent actions, studies reported by Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1970: 329, 331–2) indicate that the cathartic effects, if any, are short-lived: "In the long run, the possibility of discharging aggressive impulses constitutes a kind of training for aggression. The animal becomes more aggressive."
 - 11 Drama is about the changes that happen to the characters. Take any drama and compare who, where, and what each character is at the beginning to what s/he is like at the end: the resultant map of the changes is a summary of the drama's action.
 - 12 Lévi-Strauss's (1969b) seminal and complicated work elaborates the "two contrasts – nature/culture, raw/cooked" (p. 338). In terms of theater, the "cooked

action" is not an imitation of problematic behavior. It is new behavior analogically or metaphorically related to its "raw" precursor. Rites of passage "cook" kinds of behavior that need socialization as well as "work on" individuals who need to be transported from one status to another. See Schechner (1985: 35-116, 261-94).

- 13 Often Balinese trance dancers are "smoked" by inhaling fumes of burning incense. As far as I can determine, the smoke itself is not psychoactive. It does not "cause" the trance, but inhaling it is a decisive moment in the process of achieving trance. When only part of the body is to go into trance – for example, the hand which is to become the broom – only that part is smoked. This smoking is not confined to Bali. I saw it in Sri Lanka too.
- 14 Eliade says of the shaman's transformation: "It is the shaman who *turns himself* into an animal just as he achieves a similar result by putting on an animal mask" (1970: 93).
- 15 Belo (1960: 223):

The feeling of lowness, which Darma described as delightful, fits in with the whole constellation of ideas about being mounted, being sat on, and so forth, wherein the pleasurable quality of the trance experience is connected with the surrendering of the self-impulses. This is one aspect of the trance state which seems to have reverberations in the trance vocabulary in whatever country these phenomena appear – and the aspect which is perhaps the hardest for non-trancers to grasp.

This "surrendering of the self-impulses" is a giving over to a specific Other: an animal, spirit, person, god, etc. In ecstasy, it is a pure giving up to noneness/oneness of being, as in Zen meditation.

- 16 Although I don't have space to expound on it here, the brevity characteristic of farce, as well as its swift, violent action and surprising reversals, offer internal evidence for the antiquity of farce. Farce's universality also indicates its antiquity. Every culture has farce, while only relatively few have tragedy in the sense of the Greeks or the Japanese.
- 17 From a letter John Emigh distributed to several of his colleagues. Emigh observed the rehearsals in 1974. For a further discussion of this particular rehearsal, see Schechner (1985: 52-4).

6

SELECTIVE INATTENTION

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL AND AESTHETIC DRAMA

Victor Turner (1974) locates four actions as the nubs of social drama: 1) breach, 2) crisis, 3) redressive action, and 4) reintegration. A breach is a situation that schisms a social unit – family, work group, village, community, nation, etc. A crisis is a precipitating event that can't be overlooked, that must be dealt with. Redressive action is what's done to overcome the crisis – the crisis itself having arisen out of the breach. Reintegration is the elimination of the original breach that mothered the crisis. Reintegration comes in two ways, either by healing the breach or by schismogenesis (see Bateson 1958).

Apply Turner's model to an actual social situation, say the November, 1975 dismissal of cabinet members by President Gerald Ford. The breach is the fact that Ford as an appointed rather than elected president carried in his cabinet a number of Nixon people. Thus Ford was forced to defend policies he might dislike as well as bear the stigma of a disgraced administration. At the same time Ford wished to seek the presidency on his own. The crisis came from a severe embarrassment to the "security community" through revelations of planned assassinations of foreign heads of state and phone-tapping of Americans as part of a widespread secret-police apparatus whose operations pinnacled