

Ritual, Performance and Children's "Play-drama":

A comparison of cultures from the perspective of family resemblance¹

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Introduction

I will compare three cultural genres: religious ritual culture, performance theatre culture and children's "play-drama" culture – from the perspective of family resemblance. We can perhaps apply some of this theory in order to reflect upon the ways in which we work in drama and theatre education.

In scientific thought, what does "family resemblance" refer to? In Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1958/1994) he stresses that "objects denoted by a term may be tied together not by one common property, but by a *network of resemblances*" (Blackburn 1996). To exemplify this abstraction: The faces of persons in the same family have some common features and some differing – but, nonetheless, the faces resemble each other. There is a network of features that emerge – for instance, facial shapes, noses, chins, hair colours and textures. This network of resemblances is the outcome of resemblances at a deeper level, at the level of family genes.

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To what *family* of cultural phenomena do the the cultures of ritual, performance and children's play-drama belong? I place them in the "cultural performance family". They are all varieties of cultural performance. And what features does the family of "cultural performance" have which we may find in various combinations in its family members? I will be looking for the visible features of the family members, as well as for their more hidden, common cultural "gene pool".

A comparison of cultural features places my discussion in the discourse of cultural (social) anthropology. Although the parameters of the topic are vast, I will attempt to draw up a cluster of thoughts which can serve as a thematic introduction.

Cultural performance

The concept of performance, as understood by the social anthropologist Victor Turner, has its etymological root in the French *parfournir* – to "accomplish completely". Turner derives from this understanding the theory that, "Performance does not necessarily have the structuralist implications of manifesting form, but rather the *processual* sense of "bringing to completeness" or "of accomplishing". In this sense, to perform would mean to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act" (Turner 1988a: 91). This is supported in the Oxford Dictionary (1933-1955), where we find: "to carry through to completion (action, process), to complete by adding what is wanted, to bring about, to go through and finish". In anthropological terms, performance does not necessarily mean performing for an outside spectator, but can also mean playing for and with the enclosed cultural collective of *performer-spectators* (see Sutton-Smith 1979), or participant-spectators.

Cultural performance, as defined by John MacAloon, is:

the occasion *in* which as a culture or society, we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others. (Carlson 1996: 23, my emphasis)

Turner defines cultural performance as an *aesthetic* family which includes such *genres* as folk-epics, ballads, stage dramas, ballet, modern dance, the novel, poetry readings, art exhibitions, and religious ritual. In these genres

the media can be both verbal and non-verbal. Each genre and its specific performances are underpinned by social structures and processes of the times in which they appear. Turner summarizes that the "genres of cultural performance constitute the plural "self-knowledge" of a group (Meyerhoff 1980, in Turner 1988b). They are *reflective* – showing ourselves to ourselves, and they are *reflexive* – arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves. In cultural performance, we may "come into the full consciousness of our human capability – and perhaps human desire... All this requires *skill, craft, a coherent, consensually validated set of symbols and social arenas for appearing*. It also requires an audience in addition to performers (Turner 1988b: 42, my emphasis).

In the cultural performance family, what is the network of features among the aesthetic genres of ritual, performance, and children's play-drama? What features do they share and what features do they not share? What are their likenesses and what are their differences? These are the questions that social anthropology poses in order to understand the cultural significance and meanings that a performance communicates to the cultural group participating in it – either as performers, spectators, or both.

Cultural comparison

How do we go about identifying the common properties that constitute a network of cultural resemblances? Cultural comparison is the ethnographical *sine qua non* of social anthropology. Through comparison of the phenomenon in one cultural context with a similar phenomenon in another cultural context, its *distinctive* characteristics can become profiled. In other words, one understands the practices, meanings and significance of a phenomenon in one cultural context on the horizon of similar phenomena in other cultural contexts. The arts institution of theatre is one cultural context for drama performance, religious ritual is another cultural context for drama performance, and children's playing is a third context for drama performance – which is why I call it *play-drama*. These three cultures can be compared and thereby profile each other's distinctions.

Before describing features of each genre I will briefly define them.

Definitions of the Cultural Genres

Which cultural genre should I define first? I have chosen to start with children's play-drama both because this has been the object of my doctoral

research (Guss 2000) and for reasons related to my understanding of *playing* as the origin of human symbolic culture. Both the psycho-analyst D.W. Winnicott, in his theory of infant use of transitional phenomena, and the cultural historian Johann Huizinga, understand the mental and physical sphere of playing as the cultural sphere from which all religious, aesthetic and artistic symbolic expression emanates. This would include children's dramatic playing, religious ritual and performance theatre.

Play-drama performance

I have developed the concept of *play-drama*. It denotes children's collective pretend playing – their *dramatic* playing – which I understand to be a drama performance in the cultural context of children's playing. I will first define dramatic playing, and will then turn to the idea of *playing* as a cultural context.

In collective dramatic playing the players create and enact a pretend world – a situation, a fiction, a drama. They do this through symbolic use of, for example, body, voice, language, dialog, sound, objects, lighting, space, and time. In the symbolic expressions, they represent and fictionalize earlier life experiences – sensory images of situations, persons, places and times. The term *drama* denotes situations that have interrelational oppositions, tensions or conflicts. Play-drama has two major sub-genres: social realistic (or socio-dramatic) drama and inventive fantasy drama – but they can often be combined in the same performance. Inventive fantasy performances are generally less structured by thematic and formal pre-scripts than social-realistic performance. All play-dramas have formal conventions that circulate among children. These serve as contracts that make the collective fictionalization possible and that keep the performance in motion; but the players can also invent conventions as a necessity for expressing impulses that *emerge* in the acts of playing.

Play-drama performance arises spontaneously² among children in the course of their daily social lives, in continuity with it, but in a separate aesthetic socio-cultural sphere. It is a social discourse in which the players express themselves in symbolic-aesthetic form.

How can playing be understood as the cultural context for drama performance?

² I use the word "spontaneous" in order to contrast it to pre-planned drama either in theatre or adult led drama processes.

Playing

There is no one all-encompassing explanation of the concept of play. In order to explain the way in which I conceive of it, I will turn to the arts philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer's understanding. His definition can stand as a metaphor for the *game* of playing: Play is free impulse. It is the continual, repeated back and forth movement, in which neither of the poles of the movement represent a goal where the movement can come to rest. Play is the occurrence of the movement in itself. Play is a human structure which has its source of movement in itself (Gadamer 1960/1996). When I define *playing* as the cultural context for children's collective drama performance, I am referring to their abandonment to this aesthetic, back and forth movement and energizing force. Understood in this way, play can also be understood as a *medium* for drama performance. It is in this *moving* medium that children play with their life experiences, they play with symbolic expression and dramatic form, they actualize, express, explore and interpret their experiences – including aesthetic experiences. Their experiences are the materials, the red rubber balls, that they play with *in* the medium, and cultural context, of *playing*.

Gadamer, Winnicott, and the cultural historian Johan Huizinga all place human playing in the cultural and aesthetic sphere. Huizinga describes a cluster of aesthetic qualities in play: rhythm, change, alternation, repetition, succession, association, separation, ordering, tension, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, ever-recurring patterns, beat and counterbeat, rise and fall (Huizinga 1944/1955). He also posits play and drama as part of the same cultural cloth, in their quality of being an action, a cultural action. And Gadamer maintains that for a drama to exist, it must be played. *Played* here could be substituted with *performed* – or *displayed*.

In the aesthetic culture of playing children – in *children's aesthetic play culture* – drama performances can emerge. They are performances in the sense that the children play their experiences for their own inner eyes and for their co-performers (Sutton-Smith 1979).

Ritual performance

From the various anthropological understandings of the phenomenon of ritual, I will summarize how Victor Turner's later theory has synthesized a view. He understands ritual as a processual performance that brings to completion part of a cultural process of the participants. Rather than placing the emphasis on the communication of important cultural knowledge,

Turner understands ritual "more as the handling of otherwise unmanageable power" (Turner 1988b: 81). Rituals transform the participants' consciousnesses – in regard to transitions in their lives and the new meanings that accompany these. They are cultural sites where, "irreducible ambiguities and antinomies are made visible and thus accessible to public and legitimate control" (Ibid.).

Turner further defines the *distinction* of the concept of *religious* ritual – by comparing it to the concept of *secular* ritual – which he means should rather be called "ceremony". Whereas secular rituals are socially normative and indicative, religious rituals are culturally transformative of the consciousness of the cultural group (1988a: 157). In Turner's theory, any serious definition of ritual must include an understanding of its *liminal*, or transformational, phase. The liminal phase in ritual is religious – in the spiritual zone, it is *anti-secular*. In order to understand liminality we have to understand Arnold van Gennep's (Turner 1988b) ritual concept of *process-based structure*:

There are certain rules, or frames, for ritual and one is its unidirectional movement. It is in this movement, or process-based structure, that the potential for spiritual transformation of consciousness lies. This directionality is actualized by means of performative sequencing, what we could call dramaturgy. Turner bases his understanding of the ritual rule of performance sequencing on van Gennep's discovery of the three phases of ritual process: (1) the pre-liminal phase – the period of separation of the participants in time and space from their daily life sphere, (2) the liminal phase – the threshold rites of chaos, directionlessness and ambiguities of meaning which emerge on the margin between the structures of the past and the future, and (3) the post-liminal phase – the rites of re-aggregation or re-integration in society. It is this performative sequencing that effects transformation of consciousness.

"Performance"

I have given a general definition of performance above. As we noted, this highlights its character of "bringing-forthness". Performance is also used to denote an artform genre in a postmodern and post-structuralist artistic praxis. In the theatre-related cultural family, it is called "performance theatre" or "new performance". I will call it New Performance here, in order to distinguish it from the culture of traditional theatre performances. In cross-disciplinary scholarship related to performance, this genre comes under the umbrella of critical theory – new theory. Whereas, in a *modern-*

ist theatrical paradigm we find a concern with the closed art object – in the post-modernist performance paradigm we find a concern with the work-in-progress, the incomplete, the contingent, the fluid (Carlson 1996: 124). Within theatre culture, New Performance resists inherited cultural forms and meanings, narrativity and traditional modes of representation.

A Description of Cultural-aesthetic Features

Before selecting and describing features of these genres of cultural performance, there is one common feature that frames all three. This has to do with the concept of *representation*. All performance has the characteristic of representation or presentation of experience. One can approach an understanding of the representational features of performance genres by placing them in relation to the various Western (systematized) *theories* of performance representation. Even though the theories are products of Western culture, they can provide concepts – praxis vocabularies – that can be employed as system-independent tools for approaching and understanding representation in other geographical cultural spheres.

As systems, these Western theories are inextricably linked to the cultures and the epochs in which they have arisen – their values, their ideologies, their epistemologies. This is so in relation to two major aspects: the cultural epoch's concept of "reality-truth" – or the meanings of experience; and the cultural epoch's belief or disbelief in the ability to represent these meanings in an artistic form that can communicate them. Representing an interpretation of experience in a performance demands a representational form, aesthetic or artistic, that can represent its meanings truthfully. I will provide a greatly oversimplified overview of the three major Western paradigms of representation and their dramaturgies.

Theories of representation – an overview

(see Szatkowski 1993 and Kyndrup 1998)

In *Poetics*, Aristotle adheres to the belief that there *is* an objective reality and that it *can* be represented truthfully in dramatic art. His classical representational paradigm for tragedy in ancient Greece was dominant in *official* theatre – as opposed to folk-cultural theatre (Nygaard 1992) – until modernity's emergence in mid-18th century. In this paradigm in the theatre, there is a progressive, linear narrative and unity of place, time and action, with clear conventions for dramaturgical structuring. The intention is

to involve the spectator emotionally in the hero's plight, such that identification, a clear perspective on meaning and *catharsis* can arise. This paradigm has stretched its mighty influence into contemporary theatre arts and commercial media products.

Since the mid-18th century, a modernist representational paradigm has evolved which claims that reality can only be perceived subjectively and that, therefore, an artistic objectification of the truth of reality is but a subjective representation of a subjectively perceived truth. In other words, there is no *one* objective truth to be represented – and the dramaturgical components and their structure must communicate this. This paradigm questions the conventional norms for viewing reality and for viewing its aesthetic representations. There may be narratives, but they are fragmented in terms of non-unified place, time, and action. In the differing dramaturgical structures of its genres, the fragments may or may not coalesce in a common *dénouement* in which a clear perspective on meaning arises for the spectator.

We find a development of the modernist paradigm in the postmodern, or paramodern, paradigm that has evolved in the 20th century. This paradigm adheres to the belief that if we can only objectify subjectively, then we can mount *many* reality truths, reality bits, in *many* dramaturgical versions in *one* performance. We can represent experience from differing perspectives – a paradigm of *perspectivism*. In this paradigm, there is no cohesive narrative. The perspectives offer fragments with some progressive story elements, but these do not coalesce to produce a clear perspective on meaning for the spectator. Meaning either does not arise or is problematized through what is called *anti-representational* dramaturgies. The spectator must make her own interpretations based on her own life experiences.

In each paradigm cultural sense is made from aesthetically constructed and experienced representations. Each of the performance genres I am discussing can be understood to belong chiefly to one of the representational paradigms, but with certain divergences. Eventually, I will place our family members in these paradigms.

A network of resemblances

It is highly difficult to discuss one feature of a genre without discussing its relationship with or its consequences for another feature. In performances in each culture, the features interpenetrate so that they form differing *patterns*. Nonetheless, I have selected a network of features and will use them in an ordering that attempts to build a meaningful comparative foun-

dation. I have selected nine major features that I will briefly describe in each of the family members:

- cultural intentions
- performance modes
- acting
- the potential for reflective and reflexive positionings of performers and spectators
- aspects of playing
- the relationships between process and product
- the relationship between producer/performer/spectator aspects
- the potential for transformation of experience vs. the confirmation of experience - or interrogation of experience vs. reproduction of experience
- the production of particular meanings or of universal meanings

Because of the complexity and contingencies of each genre and its sub-genres it is not possible to reduce the discussion of this network of features to a tidy, linear, point by point summation.

Play-drama features³

³ The basis for my theoretical understanding about the aesthetic, reflexive and cultural features of play-drama comes from the findings of three, indepth, aesthetic analyses of drama performances. These were collected in a field study in a group of kindergarten children ranging in age from 2-7 years. The goal of the study was to create a better understanding about *how* children play in dramatic form, and how their imaginations, minds and thoughts are at *play* in the aesthetic, form-making process, – *as well as* what significance their aesthetic practice has in the formation of children's socio-cultural sphere. The methodology for achieving these goals was to compare the aesthetic practices in play-drama with those in selected contemporary performances in theatre and in religious ritual.

The play-drama performances I have studied include only three female players between the ages of 3 1/2 and 5 1/2, in one kindergarten in the capital city of Norway. And although the findings cannot be generalized to represent all children, they do represent a *possibility* for all children who are aesthetically fostered in the way the fieldgroup has been. As a fieldsite, the kindergarten can be characterized to a high degree as constituting a *drama-culture*, with a pedagogical focus on children's aesthetic experience as performers and spectators in dramatic playing and adult led drama processes, and as spectators of theatre. The kindergarten and the pedagogical practices of the personell can be considered as a broader cultural context surrounding children's play-culture. I have not studied the aesthetic cultures of the children's culturally varied homes but, rather, have focussed on *how* the children's collaborative performances in kindergarten *are* – aesthetically and reflexively.

I have found that play-drama has a unique *cultural aesthetic*, one that emerges from its total embeddedness in the daily-day social lives of the children in kindergarten. I will provide short summaries of two play-dramas as exemplification that can bring the generalizations to life.

Examples

The least complex performance, *On a Boat at the Beach*, lasts 5 minutes, and involves two girls on a boat at the beach – during which they encounter disruptive crabs, make themselves comfortable on their sunchairs, spread sunscreen, sun themselves, swim, and eat their picnics. The major performative action modes are the symbolic use of objects to represent other objects, and miming the use of absent objects. It is a tightly concentrated and focussed performance of sensory reminiscence – in a form that resembles a piano duo – in which the players share their individual experiences. Their earlier experiences are prescripts for and give direction to the representational process. This can be characterized as a social-realistic performance in which the players' experiences are confirmed.

The most complex performance, *Capture the Wolf, We Shall!* lasts forty minutes and involves two mothers who capture and punish a wolf who threatens their babies and baby chickens. It is divided into two major parts, but I will summarize only the first part. It consists to a large extent of capturing and punishing the (for us) invisible wolf. The punishment is executed by hopping on him (on a mattress) from the great height of a ladder chair. The non-symbolic game of repeated hopping is transformed in the performance to a symbolic vehicle for torture. The movement is circular: first the leaps from the chair, then circling back to the chair, where the performers warn, revile, and ridicule the wolf in short incantations – resembling aspects of a folk-cultural grotesque realism. One of the players, in her circle back to the chair, also performs narrative bits of three different fairy tales in which the wolf is the antagonist. She does this through the complex use of the narrator-position combined with short mimed episodes from the tales, resembling Dario Fo's technique in his dramatic monologues.

The traditional fairy tales are the prescripts for the performance, but rather than imitating them, the performers interrogate and transform their meanings. Through reversals and inversions they turn the culturally inherited *status quo* on its head. Thus, the players transform their cultural and emotional experiences.

Description

In describing play-drama's general features below, I have constructed summaries of complex processes.

- If we speculate about what children's cultural intention is, we could say that it is to play together and to be played together, to abandon themselves to the impulses and experiences which *arise* in the aesthetic back and forth movement of playing.
- The players' earlier experiences are the materials that they throw into the cultural arena to be played with and on, but the players are played by impulses that are triggered by the movement's chance occurrences.
- Play-drama performance is an aesthetic process. It is an open, interpretive, form-seeking and meaning-seeking work-in-progress. The players both give direction to the drama and are caught up in the movement of its chance happenings.
- The children use a plurality of performance modes and create the drama from many reflexive performance positions: Children can perform in all the positions that exist in the production, performance and reception of theatre performances: i.e. *dramatist, actor, narrator, director, dramaturg, scenographer, light designer, props-person, choreographer-dancer, sound designer, composer-musician, spectator, commentator/critic*. There is a continual interplay among these positions/actions in the process of the performance, and there is a non-hierarchical use and value of expressive elements. They come into play as equal parts of an unwinding explorative and interpretive process.
- There is no separation between performer and spectator positions; each performer is also a spectator to his own and the others' performance. All the players are *performer-spectators*. There is no intention to communicate with spectators outside of the performance.
- As actors, the children in social realistic performance can enact role stereotypes. I have not recorded material that could be characterized as depth-psychological portrayal. In inventive fantasy performance, the children most often seem to be taking the role of themselves, but themselves in fictionalized situations - situations in which they can express qualities that are not part of their daily social-expressive repertoire.
- The performance positions are reflexive positions. In philosophical terms, "a relation is *reflexive* if everything in the domain reflects back upon itself" (Blackburn 1996). Reflexivity is *relational*. It is a mental operation that occurs *between* positions. The concept of reflexivity can

refer both to the reflexive movement of "mental operations being turned or directed back upon the mind itself", or as the movement of *reflection* – the mode by which the mind deals with ideas received by sensations and perception (Oxford Universal Dictionary). The children's minds are moving back and forth between producing the performance, enacting the drama, and spectating and commenting upon it from outside of the performance frame. There is a continual interpretative, reflexive positioning between what is stored in the senses and the imagination and what, and how, this is performed.

- There is a continual reflexive interplay between two sets of actions in relation to the experience that is being performed: the dramatic actions which constitute the drama, and the production actions of the director, scenographer, props-person etc. - which make the enactment possible. There is no separation between formal content and meaning content. *How* the players perform is inextricably connected to *what* they are "saying".
- There is no attempt to universalize meanings. Each child's subjective experience is objectified in a common performance, it is shared but not necessarily with a consensual result. Ambiguities of meanings can emerge which remain unresolved. On the other hand, each child's individual formal experience is shared and can be developed - adopted or adapted – in the aesthetic practice of the co-performers.

In summary, there is an aesthetic and reflexive process in play-drama culture, related both to the choice of expressive modes, their sequencing, and their expression. The performance and its new experience emerge from and are a part of a processual-sensual play with and experiencing of form and its meanings.

Ritual performance features

- The *cultural intentions* of a ritual are defined by the cultural "authorities", based on long cultural tradition. The cultural intention is that, "groups and individuals adjust to internal changes and adapt to their external environment" (Turner 1988b:156).
- Ritual performances are dramaturgically pre-designed by ritual specialists for their cultural efficacy. They effect transformation of consciousness through their structuring of the relationships between performance modes and through the aesthetic qualities of these modes. Participants

may be aesthetically engaged through music, dance, drama – dramatic structure and plot – in a complex of both variant and invariant episodes; gesture and facial expression, texts, visual symbols, taste of consecrated food, touch of sacred persons and objects, smell of incense. These are synchronized in an aesthetic appeal to all the senses.

Example - description

Because ritual practices vary so greatly, I will briefly exemplify from Bruce Kapferer's theory (1986) about a contemporary Hindu ritual for demon exorcism in the southern region of Sri Lanka. This example brings to light how the ritual aesthetics and dramaturgy cause efficacious shifts in the relationships between performer, participant and spectator. The qualities in these relationships have a central function in the transformational outcome for the suffering community member. I will first address the relationship between text, dramaturgy and performer-spectator relationships:

- The ritual script and "dramaturgy" for the performance text are handed down through hundreds of years as the result of their cultural efficacy in effecting a desired transformational outcome. The main *performers* of the prescriptive text are the ritual specialists - dancers, musicians, and enactors of the drama. They can be understood as the "production team". The suffering community member is structured into the *participant* functions of both performing and spectating, as are community members at large. The participation of the latter group has a central function in the culturally transformative outcome of bringing the suffering member to a healed state of mind and back into the cultural group.
- The term *actor* would not be suitable in this context. The performing ritual specialists are *mediums* for the spirits of demons and dieties – who enter into the performance through the mediums.
- In the ritual process, the qualities and sequencing of the various performance modes effect shifts in who is performing and who is spectating.
- The qualities and dramaturgical juxtapositions of performance modes cause shifts in the levels of awareness and reflection in the participants. These can vary between reflective states and non-reflective states: in the pre-liminal phase, the placement of the community at large *apart* in the physical setting from the demon-ridden member exacerbates her feeling of isolation and torment. Furthermore, in moving to a sequence of mu-

sic and dance, *all* the participants are isolated in their own subjective experience. This causes a liminal phase of chaos, in which ambiguous demon figures stream into the community through the spiritual medium of the ritual specialists. In contrast to this *anti-structure* to the cultural-religious order, the subsequent comic drama provides a clear perspective on experience and its meanings, and unites the patient with the whole community. In the drama, the demons are taunted by the dieties, are ridiculed and chased away, such that the patient is re-integrated into the community through the cultural means of shared laughter. This post-liminal dramatic structure provides a clear perspective and its accompanying reflective distance.

- *Playing* enters into the ritual performance in a way that is characterized by the performance theorist Richard Schechner, as:

the ongoing, underlying process of off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring, and transforming - the permeating, eruptive-/disruptive energy and mood below, behind, and to the sides of focused attention. (Schechner 1993: 43)

In summary, this is an example of ritual in which there is a clear epistemological-religious intention of transformation of consciousness and re-integration of the excluded member into the dominant cultural values and its universal meanings. It has an instrumental, directional dramaturgical structuring of performance modes and qualities; a structuring of varying reflective and non-reflective positions - and belonging and not belonging - in the participant-spectator dyad. It is conservative of values.

As to the lingering question about such a ritual's potential for changing cultural *traditions* – in Turner's later theory, he understands the traditionally passed-down structural rules or conventions as *frames*, but frames that do not hinder an eventual, generative cultural outcome. Turner stresses that,

the flow of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances (Turner 1988a: 79)

In other words, ritual processes, although they may initially be conservative of cultural values, may also be – in their modelling of *anti-structure* – potential seedbeds of cultural change. (see Sutton-Smith 1972)

New Performance features

To provide a referential source, I will exemplify briefly with material from my analyses of two New Performance groups which have differing aesthetics. Wooster Group is based in New York City, and Forced Entertainment is based in Sheffield, England.

Examples

In Wooster Group's performance *House/Lights* the group plays with and intertextualizes two texts: a B-film called *Olga's House of Shame* and Gertrude Steins opera libretto, *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*. In the title of the performance, *House* [i.e. of shame] can refer to the search for the sensual; and *Lights* can refer to the search for enlightenment. These are the two oppositional poles between which there is a back and forth play movement. The two texts create two layers of meaning that are in opposition to one another. They are the starting points for a performance deconstruction – in a physically exuberant, fragmented, tightly choreographed, shining performance text which involves the technologically advanced use of sound and video monitors. The randomness of its devising process has become part of the work-in-progress aesthetic of the performance. The end result is a dramaturgy and an aesthetic that can both light up and confound the spectators. We are activated in a meaning-seeking process.

As a visual contrast, Forced Entertainment's *Club of No Regrets* is a performance of the group's sensory experience of the violent, emotionless culture that surrounds them. It is mounted in a shabby, fragmented, clipped, repetitive form of reversing narratives, with the theme of assaulter-victim. Visible as central elements in the performance are the *production actions* of stagehands, props-persons and director. These may have been used spontaneously in the devising process, but in performance they have been fictionalized. The production actions create a metafictional level running along side of the drama. Again, we have two layers of meaning that interpenetrate indeterminately. This performance is a highly artistic cousin to the aesthetic process in play-drama, where we also find the dual presence of production actions and dramatic actions. *Club of No Regrets* has aesthetic qualities and dramaturgy that both grip spectators with their harsh relentlessness and dark humour, and confound them with their ambi-

guities. As with *House/Lights*, the spectators are activated in a meaning-seeking process.

Description

In regard to its cultural intention, we can examine New Performance in terms of its reflexive relationship to the "real world". It can be considered as a politically resistant cultural performance, one that radically challenges the dominant beliefs and practices within the general culture and within the theatre culture's processes of representation. For instance, in the context of sexual, gender, post-colonial and racial politics, New Performance disrupts "the smooth structure of authority" (Carlson 1996: 142) – in cultural-aesthetic critiques of a variety of artistic epistemologies and praxes.

The concepts of work-in-progress, incompleteness, contingency and fluidity all point to the process through which these performances are created. - In contrast to the general approach of pre-scripted theatre, New Performance is characterized as *devised* theatre. If there *is* a dramatic text, or texts, it/they are often intertextualized and treated as one among the many non-hierarchical artistic media, or performance modes. These are played with in the devising process and come to have equal expressive value in the constitution of the performance. But many New Performances take their points of departure in cultural experience rather than a dramatic text. The production team plays with their cultural experience as it has been sensorily stored in their imaginations. It is characterized by a crossover of aesthetic conventions belonging to both élitist avant-garde and popular cultures.

Relating these practices to their underlying assumptions, epistemological and metaphysical questions, they are performances of the sensual process of *discovering* meaning – the launching of bits of reality and critical variations on these bits of reality, in a radically non-linear dramaturgy. They play radically with conventions of traditional theatre and are examples of anti-representation. In a non-epistemological representational paradigm, New Performance is critical to unifying and monolithic dramaturgical structures. There may be *agon*, or dramatic conflict, but it is split and spread in a non-linear dramaturgy that creates ambiguity, rather than culminating in a tidy *dénouement*. In sum, in New Performance we find a non-directive composition of dramaturgical components.

In regard to the relationship between performers and spectators, the power of interpretation now lies with the observer. Because of non-progressive fragments and non-linear structure, the performance does not

tell the audience what the performance means. In this way the traditional theatrical reception aesthetic is inverted. New Performance plays with known conventions and dramaturgies as well as with audience expectations of these. It plays on each spectator's unique life experiences, including theatre experiences, and allows individual interpretations of meaning. What is required of the spectator is a special kind of, what the cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls, "cultural capital". Only a knowledge of the conventions of mainstream theatre *and* ever-evolving postmodern developments makes it possible to enjoy the cultural *game* of a New Performance – in terms of the way it comments upon them and draws attention to its own modes of performativity.

Family Resemblances and Differences

Having delineated some dominant features of each of the performance genres I will, summarily, compare them. As with the descriptions, the comparison must be considered as a playful attempt at a conclusion. To do both in depth would demand a whole book. I have arrived at a *provisional* network of resemblances and differences. The way in which resemblances and differences are combined *in sum*, allows each performance genre to be apprehended as distinctive.

- Representational paradigms: I will place our family members, generally, in the paradigms that were described earlier, with play-drama as the focal point. Play-drama that is predominantly inventive fantasy belongs to the postmodern, perspectivistic paradigm of playing with and interrogating experience, one of relative positionings. In this sense it resembles New Performance. It is more difficult to place predominantly social realistic play-drama. Perhaps we could say that it belongs chiefly to a classical paradigm. It has a prescriptive experiential text that is constrictive, but it is interpreted and performed with individual-subjective variations. In the aspect of a constrictive pre-text, social realistic play-drama resembles ritual performance. Most ritual performance, and the type that I have exemplified here, belongs to the classical paradigm of a unifying and monolithic dramaturgical structure with the intention of universalizing cultural experience; *but* – in its liminal phase, there is a play of perspectives and ambiguities. Nonetheless, in

its postliminal re-integrative phase, these are resolved in clear perspective on meaning for the participant-spectators.

- Cultural intentions: In play-drama the cultural intention is to play and be played. In ritual performance the cultural intention is defined by centuries of tradition for its transformational efficacy. In New Performance the cultural intention is to resist traditional representational form and interpretation of cultural experience.
- Performance modes: All the performance genres can include scenographic elements, script, dramatic action, musical elements, dance, symbolic objects, mask/makeup and costume. In play-drama and New Performance situations are fictionalized and acting is "pretend". In ritual, situations are *actualized*. Ritual specialists "presence" rather than "act".
- Reflexivity: The children's aesthetic practice is a reflexive practice in three senses of the concept: firstly, the players *reflect over* experience they have received by sensations and perceptions - both outside their performance and inside the performance process. Secondly, their performative reflection is reflexive - it is *positioned* reflexively, relationally, between their past experiences and their present experiences in the performance. Thirdly, their performative actions also *mirror* their own child-cultural views; and they mirror their attitudes toward the culture of which they are a part - the wider adult hegemony and its cultural traditions. These features also characterize the devising process in New Performance.

The ritual, as a tradition-bearing performance, mirrors the "reality" of both cultural disorder and cultural order. For the patient, the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases are structured for distanced reflection, whereas the anti-structural chaos of the liminal phase hinders reflective distance.

- Playing: To create a more detailed vocabulary for comparing this feature in all three cultures, we can use concepts presented by the cultural theorist Roger Caillois (1958/1961). Caillois distinguishes between two types of playing: *Paidia* - spontaneous anarchic play, and *ludus* - conventional play which is governed by rules. Classical dramaturgies and some modernist dramaturgies, for example that of epic theatre, come under *ludus* - as do the uni-directional dramaturgical structure of ritual and social realistic play-drama; whereas postmodern dramaturgies belong under *paidia* - as in both fantasy play-drama and New Perform-

ance. In all play-drama there are traditional conventions which make collective playing possible. These are the communicational and positional codes that serve as contracts to keep the play in motion. Beyond these, dramaturgical structures or conventions can emerge freely in the processual, work-in-progress. Whereas, in New Performance, the prime rule of the game being played is to radically transform traditional coding, conventions and dramaturgies and inherited meanings and the invention of "the new".

- The relationship between producer/performer/spectator aspects: We find in play-drama and New Performance the three-tiered layers of the actions: in producing, performing and spectating/commenting on – the performance. These are central features of their aesthetic. In ritual performance, however, these levels are dispersed. Ritual specialists are performing participants and spectators throughout the whole ritual; whereas the patient and the community members are variously participant-performers – for instance in the liminal dance and music sequences and spectators during other phases.

In play-drama and New Performance, as part of the work-in-progress aesthetic, the production actions are largely visible and can be very complexly interwoven with the dramatic action. Whereas, in ritual performance, the "producing" ritual specialists have masked over the production seams. – They can effect productional transitions from one sequence to another, in order to create the necessary ambiance for keeping the participants immersed in the aesthetic experience.

- Process and/or product: We find a definition of quintessential *process*, as opposed to product, in Gadamer's definition of play referred to earlier: the back and forth movement between impulses, in which the movement never comes to rest at either of the poles. In process, we find fluidity and *flow* – as opposed to a closed work. We find a play of energies and a play with relative positionings. The emphasis is on performativity rather than on communicating static meanings. - All play-drama is process-based, but in social realistic performance the conventions and prescriptive pre-texts, or cultural narratives, determine the direction of the process. They are less fluid than fantasy play-drama. In *Capture the Wolf*, the fantasy drama has, as structuring elements, cultural products – the different media representations of fairy tales. – However, the performance questions these in an open process of re-

flexive positionings. In this sense the play-drama performance resembles New Performance – which is also the artistic result of a fluid aesthetic devising process and whose cultural pre-texts are played with and questioned in a way that erases their directiveness.

In ritual there is a combination of product and process. The whole dramaturgical framework is a cultural product, but within its structure there is, for the participants, a prosessual experience.

In the three ritual phases we find the doubleness of *process-based structure*. There is a *structure-based process* which *directs* the participants' experience and meanings.

- Transformation or confirmation of experience and its meanings: In all play-drama we find the pre-liminal phase of separation from ordinary, non-aesthetic, daily social life and communicational codes. As examples, the separation phase can be entered into in the play contracts the players make with each other (i.e. – "Let's play", "I'll be so and so and you'll be so and so") and in the scenographic establishing of fictional, physical space. In these ways the players leave the ordinary behind. In non-constrictive scripts of inventive fantasy drama we can find ambiguous liminal states of consciousness, even when the fantasy elements are integrated into a basically social-realistic script. But we do not find such states in constrictive scripts of pure social-realistic drama. As a *distinction* from ritual performance, fantasy play-drama can interrogate dominant values.

In the devising process of New Performance, the performers set together cultural or formal fragments in new ways, so that their meanings are transformed for the performers. The spectator, by entering into the play of the resulting performance text can also experience a transformation of experience and meaning – in the cultural and aesthetic experience of contradictions, oppositions and unresolved complexities.

- Particular experience or universal experience: In both inventive fantasy drama and New Performance, each performer is free to reflect over and explore *aesthetically* her own subjective experience, but in a collaborative performance. Therefore, the performance as whole performs both the particular experiences *and* the pooled collective meanings of the playing cultural group. There is no attempt to universalize the particular

experiences and meanings. They remain as fragments and multi-perspectives. This is a distinction from prescribed ritual and social realistic play-drama in which the meanings of experience are universalized.

A horizontal conclusion

After this provisional overview of the resemblances among three members of the cultural performance family, it would not be untenable to conclude that in each performance genre, cultural sense is made – in and from aesthetically constructed and experienced representations, whether or not the sense that is made is prescribed or discovered.

In the discussion I have placed the three genres: children's dramatic playing, adults' religious playing, and adults' artistic playing on a *horizontal* line. It should be noted that I am not making value judgements by placing them on a *vertical*, hierarchical cultural development chart. Within their cultural contexts each genre plays a vital cultural-aesthetic role. These differing models can help us to reflect over the cultural aesthetic that we wish to foster in our own drama and theatre contexts.

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