Introduction

RICHARD SCHECHNER AND WILLA APPEL

By their performances shall ye know them

So began a short statement written by Victor Turner in December 1980 addressed to the planning committee for the upcoming series of conferences on ritual and theatre held in 1981 and 1982 in Arizona and New York. These conferences – one on the Yaqui deer dance, one on Japanese performance, and one on the interrelation of a number of genres viewed from a global perspective – were sponsored by the Wenner–Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and supported by a consortium of organizations.[1]

By Means of Performance is a further step in the process of exploring some of the interweavings of ritual and theatre, a process Victor Turner and Richard Schechner had been exploring for some time. In 1980, Turner articulated very clearly what he saw as the goal of the 1981 and 1982 conferences

> Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. [. . .] A performance is a dialectic of "flow," that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and "reflexivity," in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen "in action," as they shape and explain behavior. A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.

In his statement, Turner put forward not only his hopes for the conferences (which we were able to realize to a considerable degree) but his utopian vision of world community based on mutual respect and enjoyment of cultural differences, exchanges of feelings as well as of ideas, and the increasing ability of people to experience and re-experience each other's cultural identities.

Translating Turner's vision into workable conferences took the concerted and long term efforts of a dedicated group of planners: Lita Osmundsen, then the director of research of the Wenner-Gren Foundation; Richard Lanier, director of the Asian Cultural Council; Martha Coigney, president of the

International Theatre Institute; Jack Morrison, executive director of the American Theatre Association; Phillip Zarrilli, professor of theatre at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; and this book's co-editors Richard Schechner and Willa Appel. From time to time this core group called on others whose expertise we needed.

At first, we felt that we could pack everything into one big conference. Our ambitions were truly global – to bring together performers, scholars, directors, and choreographers from a wide cross-section of the world's cultures. We wanted these people to interact not just "academically," on the basis of prepared papers and formal responses, but through "lived experience." We intended not only to see finished performances, and fragments thereof, but methods of training, and to explore the various ways performances were received in different cultures and contexts. We wanted to consider not only "pure" performances – or idealized versions of traditional genres – but also tourist shows, hybrids, and genres in the midst of profound disturbance and/or transformation. We wanted contemporary Euro-American performance represented as well as genres from Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world. We attempted to include various kinds of performance – from sacred ritual to experimental theatre. And we wanted divergent scholarly approaches represented.

In November 1980 Schechner made a graph with three axes to show what we were aiming for (see figure 1). One axis extended from ritual through popular and folk genres on to commercial theatre; another axis led from genres with documented early origins (such as the Sanskrit kutiyattam theatre) through to very recent experimental performances; the third axis represented our desire for as wide a geographical-cultural distribution of cultures as possible.

The conferences were only partially successful in achieving these aims, just as this book is only partially successful in carrying forward the work of the conferences. If we were aiming for a "world conference," too large a proportion of the traditional forms came from Asia, and too many of the scholars from America. But we did bring together a wide range of genres and scholars from Asia, Africa, and native America.

At our planning meetings we covered walls and blackboards with charts showing how genres would possibly relate to each other. We were particularly interested in finding "link people" who could, in a sense, translate across cultural and scholarly boundaries. We struggled, for example, over how persons totally unfamiliar with India would be able to enter into a meaningful discussion of kutiyattam. We not only wanted the scholars to talk across disciplines and fields of concentration, we wanted to encourage interaction among performers from diverse cultures and genres.

We planned sessions where scholarly participants could try out training and performance techniques themselves, as a way of experiencing different genres in their bodies. We arranged for some sessions to be on site if not wholly in the

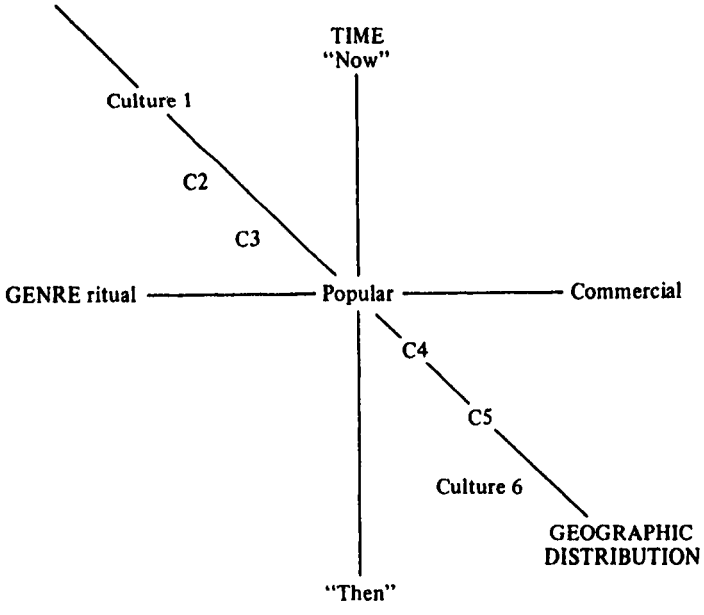

Figure 1 The three axis distributional model.
The 1980 graph with three axes drawn by Schechner to show the kinds of distribution – scope the planners of the conferences were aiming for.

field. The conference on Yaqui deer dancing was held both at Pascua Pueblo near Tucson and at the Oracle Conference Center. To initiate the August Symposium, Kim Keum-Hwa, a Korean shaman, performed a "welcoming ceremony" at the New York Korean Cultural Center. During the next twelve days we met not only at the Asia Society, our principal venue where we held many discussions and saw noh drama and kutiyattam, but also attended a church service at the Institutional Church of God in Christ in Brooklyn, saw a performance in the 23rd Street store front theatre of the experimental group Squat, and went to Broadway for *A Chorus Line*.

Our intellectual goal in the conferences, and in preparing this book, was to approach the genres of theatre, dance, music, sports, and ritual as a single, coherent group, *as performance*. The underlying question became whether or not the same methodological tools and approaches could be used to understand a noh drama, a football game, a Yaqui deer dance, a Broadway musical, a Roman Catholic Mass, an Umbanda curing ritual, a Yoruba masked dance, and a postmodern experimental performance? We knew that very few people qualified as "comparative performatologists" and so the basic question would have to be dealt with genre by genre, culture by culture. We hoped that the conferences would lay the groundwork for proposing general principles or, as Turner called them, "universals of performance." The problem that engaged us was divided into six specific areas of interest.

1. *Transformation of being and /or consciousness.* Either permanently, as in initiation rites, or temporarily as in aesthetic theatre and trance dancing a performer – and sometimes spectators too – are changed by means of performance. How does this change come about? How is it made part of a performance? The deer dancer of the Yaqui is a man and a deer simultaneously – the mask he wears atop his head, like the noh mask which is too small to cover all of the *shite*'s face – does not erase the human being who has also become the deer. The white cloth separating the deer dancer's face from the deer's head, a cloth the dancer keeps adjusting, is the physicalization of an incomplete transformation, of the simultaneous presence of man and deer. In the performance itself, at this precise juncture of time and space, the problems of representation, imitation, and transformation converge.

2. *Intensity of performance.* While performing, a certain definite threshold is crossed – that moment when spectators and performers alike sense a "successful" performance is taking place. This intensity of performance has been called "flow," "concentration," and "presence." Performances seem to gather their energies almost as if time was a concrete manipulable thing. This gathering of intensity occurs even in performances which, like the steady whirling of dervishes, do not build to a climax. But these spinning dancers, in the steady repetitive simplicity of their movements, often lift themselves to ecstatic trance, sweeping spectators along with them. The uses of monotone and monorhythm can be as intense experientially as the varied melodies and rhythms of a Beethoven symphony. Understanding intensity of performance is finding out how performances build, how they draw spectators in (or intentionally keep them out), how space, scripts, sounds, movements – the whole *mise-en-scène* – are managed. In this regard, the work of the performers is only part of the story. The scope of the inquiry broadens to include directors, visual artists, scene designers, costumers, mask-makers, and musicians.

3. *Audience-performer interactions.* How does an audience provide the context for a performance? When a performance moves to a new place encountering new audiences (on tour, for example), even if everything is kept the same, the performance changes. The same happens when an audience is imported, as when tourists or anthropologists see "the real thing." Aside from these questions of context, there is a wide range of audience behavior from full participation as in many rituals and festivals to the sharp separation of stage from audience in the proscenium theatre. And what of genres that mix participation with observation? There have been a number of experiments in Asia, America, and Africa along that line. The reception of a performance varies according to how much individual spectators know about what's going on. In noh drama, an audience of connoisseurs is sought. On the other hand, some initiation rites depend on secrecy and surprise.

4. *The whole performance sequence.* Generally Western scholars have paid more attention to the "show" – what is most understandable in Western

aesthetic terms – than to training, rehearsals, ritual frames just before and just after the performance, and the aftermath following performances. But every performance event is part of a systematic sequence of occurrences. Performance includes six or seven phases: training, rehearsal (and/or workshop), warm-up, the performance, cool-down, and aftermath. Not all performances in all cultures include all these phases – but finding out what is emphasized and what is omitted is very instructive. For example, codified traditional performances – kutiyattam and noh, for example – demand extensive training but little or no rehearsal. This makes sense: If one plays the same role or role types over and over again, and if there is an orderly and predictable progression of roles to be played over the years, the need for preparing individual *mise-en-scènes* for each production diminishes. But where newness is prized, where performers are expected to be able to play a number of different kinds of roles, training is less important than intense *ad hoc* workshops and rehearsals to develop the idiosyncratic quality of each individual production. The cool-down and aftermath phases of performance are also very important. Aftermath can be a slow unfolding process involving how performances are evaluated, how the experience of performing is used by the community. Scholarly conferences and books are aftermath phenomena. Cool-down is more immediate, dealing with knitting the performers back into the fabric of ordinary life. In Bali, for example, rituals exist that take a person out of ritual trance – for it is as important to get someone out properly as it is to put her/him in. In America, many performers, after a strenuous show, will go out to eat, drink, and talk – often boisterously. Someone who doesn't know performers wonders at how much energy they have left. But these celebratory bouts are not really "after the theatre" but part of it – a way of cooling down, of reintegrating into ordinary social life.

5. *Transmission of performance knowledge.* Performance consists of mostly oral traditions. Even where there is written drama, the arts of performing (as distinct from the dramas performed) are passed down through direct oral transmission. Precisely how these traditions are passed on in various cultures and in different genres is of central importance. Some surprising parallels exist, for example, between the way athletes are trained and the way Asian performers master their crafts. Athletic coaches are often former players. They transmit their "secrets" to younger players. Former players – living and dead – are respected for their records, singular achievements which reflect their mastery of technique. Korea and Japan have a category of performer called "Living National Treasure" roughly analogous to being in baseball's or football's Hall of Fame. Asian performing arts are historically connected to martial arts, so it is not surprising that training for the stage and for (now archaic forms of) combat are very similar. But in much of Africa, performance knowledge is transmitted in a more informal manner – through imitation beginning in very early childhood. Mothers move the arms of infants in time with the drums; young children attempt the dance steps and are lovingly

encouraged. Slowly, over many years, skills are absorbed, practiced, and sharpened. The audience during a performance is vocal in its approval or disapproval. The question of transmission of performance knowledge is not limited to how one generation learns from another, but also includes how performers learn from each other.

6. *How are performances evaluated?* This is a very sticky problem because criteria vary from culture to culture, genre to genre. Are there any "universal," or at least general, principles to be used to determine whether performances are "good" or "bad"? Do we go by the standards applied inside a given culture and if so, do we use what performers have to say or what critics, scholars, and audiences say (recognizing that these opinions are often at odds)? Also, to whom are evaluations directed – to the performers, to would-be spectators, to scholars?

These six areas of interest guided both the planning of the conferences and the organization of the book. But this book was not envisioned as a record of the conferences. It would be impossible to compress into a book the multiplex interactions of the twenty-two days of meetings held in Arizona and New York.[2] Even attempting that would take a whole other kind of project involving the transcription of many of the very lively encounters that occurred. A complete record of the conferences is on soundtapes in the archives of the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The culminating conference, the International Symposium on Theatre and Ritual, was held in New York from 23 August to 1 September 1982. Forty-eight scholars and performers participated "full-time" in the Symposium and a number of others were invited to observe some of the demonstrations and discussions. Of course the public performances of noh and kutiyattam at the Asia Society, and other genres around New York, attracted many people.

Our goal in *By Means of Performance* (a title suggested by Herbert Blau) is to continue the work of the conferences, not summarize them. As Blau pointed out in a letter he wrote in November 1982

> The critical recurrence [. . .] in Oracle [Arizona] & New York, was the question of subjectivity, in perception & methodology. [. . .] The pathos of the anthropologist that must be talked about is in that subjective distance, in the very subject of desire, which is – and this may be the appropriate bridge back from East to West – the territory of apprehension which we know a good deal more about in our theatre, with the crucial difference there being, however, that between simple-minded psychologism & psychoanalytical knowledge, knowing how we change the subject by talking about it, yet getting closer in. Anyhow, if there were another conference, I'd want to make this perceptual problem central – facing up to the presumptions of methodology, and what is ideologically behind it.

This book is, to a certain degree, in lieu of that other conference.

But we realized that a book could not capture the quality of the face to face meetings – the formal and off the record interchanges that, in deep but fleeting

ways, expressed links across cultures and genres, between and among performers and scholars. The book represents a scholarly approach, primarily articulated through analytical, formal essays. One contributor, Colin Turnbull, was unable to attend any of the conferences. Others revised their papers in light of the work of the conferences. Barbara Myerhoff was planning to do so, but cancer killed her. The book covers a wide scope and presents a healthy divergence of styles, opinions, and approaches. However, as principal conveners of the conferences and as co-editors of the book, we are sorry that there is less coming directly from the many fine practitioners who participated in the conferences. We do hear Yaqui ritual leader Anselmo Valencia, but not from members of the kutiyattam troupe, or from noh, the Korean shamans, or the Yoruba performers. Absent also is the Euro-American experimental cohort. The silence of all these practitioners is not due to their inability to articulate what they do. The absence is largely due to the very different media of communication used in live performance, the transmission of performance knowledge, the scholarship of oral traditions, and the written essay. How to overcome these gaps – even wondering if they can, or ought to be overcome – may be the emergent central question concerning anthropologists, artists, teachers, and performance scholars.

Thus this book is neither beginning nor end, but a continuation.

Notes

1 This consortium consisted of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Asia Society, the Asian Cultural Council, the International Theatre Institute, the American Theatre Association (now defunct), and the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Money for the conferences and for this book came from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Asian Cultural Council.

2 The first conference, 19–24 November 1981, took place in Arizona near Tucson at Pascua Peublo and at the Oracle Conference Center. The second conference on Japanese Theatre was held in New York at the Japan Society, 19–24 May 1982. This conference largely dealt with the work of experimental director Suzuki Tadashi whose group was performing in New York at that time. The third conference, the International Symposium on Theatre and Ritual, was held in New York 23 August–1 September 1982. See Appendix for a complete list of participants.

1

Are there universals of performance in myth, ritual, and drama?

VICTOR TURNER

In this essay I will discuss what I think is a characteristic developmental relationship from ritual to theatre, and I will lay out the relationship of both to social drama. The figures in this chapter express schematically some of these connections. I have argued that every major socioeconomic formation has its dominant form of cultural-aesthetic "mirror" in which it achieves a certain degree of self-reflexivity. Nonindustrial societies tend to stress immediate context-sensitive ritual; industrial pre-electronic societies tend to stress theatre, which assigns meaning to macroprocesses – economic, political, or generalized familial problems – but remains insensitive to localized, particularized contexts. Yet both ritual and theatre crucially involve liminal events and processes and have an important aspect of social metacommentary. In many field situations I have observed in markedly different cultures, in my experience of Western social life, and in numerous historical documents, I have clearly seen a community's movement through time taking a shape which is obviously "dramatic." It has a proto-aesthetic form in its unfolding – a generic form like the general mammalian condition that we still have with us throughout all the global radiation of specific mammalian forms to fill special niches. As detailed in my earlier writings, in the first stage, Breach, a person or subgroup breaks a rule deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting. In the stage of Crisis, conflicts between individuals, sections, and factions follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of character, interest, and ambition. These mount towards a crisis of the group's unity and its very continuity unless rapidly sealed off by redressive public action, consensually undertaken by the group's leaders, elders, or guardians. Redressive action is often ritualized, and may be undertaken in the name of law or religion. Judicial processes stress reason and evidence, religious processes emphasize ethical problems, hidden malice operating through witchcraft, or ancestral wrath against breaches or tabu or the impiety of the living towards the dead. If a social drama runs its full course, the outcome (or "consummation," as the philosopher John Dewey might have called it) – the fourth stage in my model – may be either (a) the restoration of

peace and "normality" among the participants, or (b) social recognition of irremediable or irreversible breach of schism. Of course, this mode, like all models, is subject to manifold manipulations. For example, redressive action may fail, in which case there is *reversion* to the phase of crisis. If law and/or religious values have lost their cultural efficacy, endemic continuous factionalism may infect public life for long periods. Or redressive failure in a local community may lead to appeal to a higher court at a more inclusive level of social organization – village to district to province to nation. Or the *ancien régime* may be rejected altogether and revolution ensue. There may a "transvaluation of values."

In that case the group itself may be radically restructured, including its redressive machinery. Culture obviously affects such aspects as the style and tempo of the social drama. Some cultures seek to retard the outbreak of open crisis by elaborate rules of etiquette. Others admit the use of organized ritualized violence (almost in the ethological sense) in crisis or redress, in such forms as the holmgang (island single-combat) of the Icelanders, the stick-fights of the Nuba of the Sudan, and the reciprocal head-hunting expeditions of the Ilongot hill peoples of Luzon in the Philippines. Simmel, Coser, Gluckman and others have pointed out how conflict, if brought under gradual control, stopping short of massacre and war, may actually enhance a group's "consciousness of kind," may enhance and revive its self-image. For conflict forces the antagonists to diagnose its source, and in so doing, to become fully aware of the principles that bond them beyond and above the issues that have temporarily divided them. As Durkheim said long ago, law needs crime, religion needs sin, to be fully dynamic systems, since without "doing," without the social friction that fires consciousness and self-consciousness, social life would be passive, even inert. These considerations, I think, led Barbara Myerhoff (1978: 22) to distinguish "definitional ceremonies" as a kind of collective "autobiography," a means by which a group creates its identity by telling itself a story about itself, in the course of which it brings to life "its Definite and Determinate Identity" (to cite William Blake). Here, meaning, in Wilhelm Dilthey's sense, is engendered by marrying present problems of the living present to a rich ethnic past, which is then infused into the "doings and undergoings" (to quote John Dewey) of the local community. Some social dramas may be more "definitional" than others, it is true, but most social dramas contain, if only implicitly, some means of *public reflexivity* in their redressive processes. For by their activation groups take stock of their own current situation: the nature and strength of their social ties, the power of their symbols, the effectiveness of their legal and moral controls, the sacredness and soundness of their religious traditions, and so forth. And this is the point I would make here: the world of theatre, as we know it both in Asia and America, and the immense variety of theatrical sub-genres derive not from imitation, conscious or unconscious, of the processual form of the complete or "satiated" social drama – breach, crisis, redress, reintegration, or schism – but

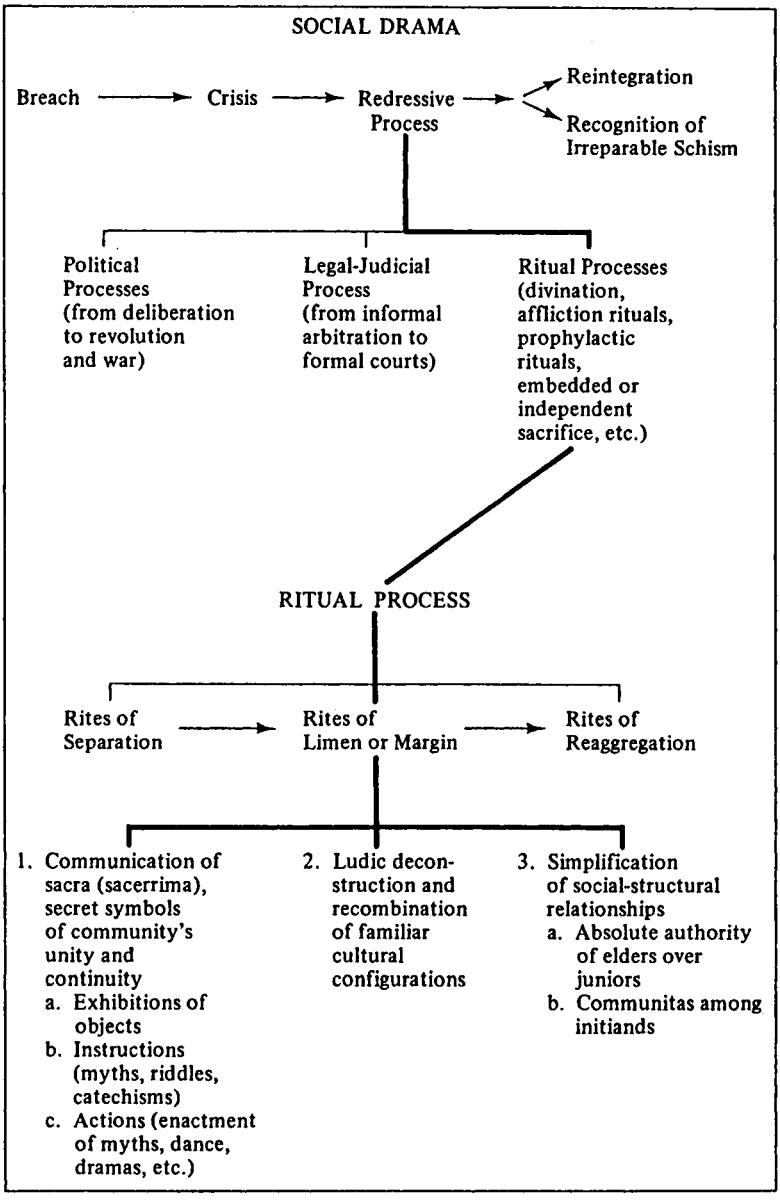

Figure 1.1 The relationship between social drama and ritual process.