

TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRANSFORMATION FROM RITUAL TO THEATRE

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Abstract: Anthropologists and theatre historians have long posited a generic and historical relationship between ritual and theatre. This paper proposes that the emergence of theatre in state level societies may be understood by viewing the functions of theatre as adaptive transformations of the social control and integration functions characteristic of communal rituals in non-state societies. The proposition is tested against data concerning the sociopolitical circumstances surrounding the appearance of theatre in the newly emerged states of Ancient Greece and of Aztec Mexico.

Résumé: Depuis longtemps, les anthropologues et les chroniqueurs de l'art dramatique tentent d'énoncer les relations génériques et historiques entre le théâtre et le rite. Dans cette étude on propose de démontrer que les débuts de l'art théâtral dans les groupes sociaux d'un état deviennent compréhensibles quand l'on considère ses fonctions de transformations adaptatives du contrôle social ainsi que l'intégration des fonctions caractéristiques des rites communaux dans les groupes sociaux pas organisées en état. Pour prouver cette proposition, on a fait comparaison aux circonstances sociopolitiques de l'origine du théâtre dans les jeunes états de la Grèce de l'antiquité et des Aztèques du Mexique.

Preface

The contents of the following pages are the fruit of an intense afternoon and evening conversation between an anthropologist and a dramaturge, and of subsequent months of research and deliberation. This co-operative interchange of ideas in an academic setting, and between members of seemingly divergent disciplines, has generated an intellectual and collegial sense of accomplishment which reiterates the original sense of "the university."

Introduction

The circumstances giving rise to theatre have long been of intense interest to theatre historians. The subject has also received intermittent attention from anthropologists over the past many decades. There presently lacks a truly satisfactory explanation for the observation that the theatre as an organized activity came into being independently in historically unconnected complex societies. The following pages are an attempt to devise a clear explanatory model and to apply that model to the extant data pertaining to the social and political circumstances surrounding the early development of theatre.

There exists a longstanding proposition that theatre is in some fashion derived from ritual. To a great extent this opinion has been based upon untested or untestable hypotheses relating to a dubious historiography of Ancient Greece. There is a connection between ritual and theatre. The nature of the relationship may not be ascertained by historical speculation, but rather by the construction of a plausible explanatory model testable against available and appropriate data from the past. The thesis of this article is that, in those times when and at those places where the theatre is first seen to emerge, that emergence is best understood by viewing the major structural and functional attributes of theatre (associated with state level societies) as evolutionary transformations of homologous elements of communal ritual found in non-state societies. Due to specifics of the structure of "state," the social control and integrative functions characteristic of communal ritual in non-state societies may no longer be importantly implemented by such ritual. We, thus, view the theatre as a transformation of the character of some of the elements of communal ritual such that functions of social control and integration may continue under the new social circumstances of the emergent state. Our thesis is tested against data pertaining to Ancient Greece and to the Aztec State.

The Transformation from Ritual to Theatre

Previous Thought

For the most part observations on the part of theatre historians and anthropologists concerning the relationship between ritual and theatre as an organized activity have employed theoretically nonspecific terms of reference evidencing a belief in the chronological priority and "generative antecedence" of ritual. Such expressions as the following abound: rituals giving rise to theatre; theatre springing from ritual; a transition from ritual to theatre; the ritual origins of theatre; the shift from ritual to theatre. In at least one recent treatment of the subject theatre is seen to have "evolved" from ritual (Friedrich 1983:171), but the use of this term does not signify, as is implied, the handling of the subject within an identifiable social or cultural evolutionary explanatory framework.

What is there about the perceived nature of ritual and of theatre which has induced the long-held conviction that the relationship between the two is one involving linear causal relations beginning with ritual and proceeding in the direction of theatre?

Ritual

A contemporary handbook defining and illustrating major anthropological concepts refers to ritual as: "Broadly conceived, any prescribed, stylized stereotypical way of performing some act. Narrowly, a single act of a religious performance" (Vivelo 1978:257). Further reference is made to the fact that "ritual" and "ceremony" have often been used interchangeably. Patterned, repetitive, and even quite private activities characteristic of a culture (such as typical urban North American morning bathroom activities) may be considered usefully for some purposes as constituting "secular ritual." For the greater part, however, in and out of anthropology, the term ritual refers to culturally patterned, repetitive activities having as their prime explicit aim the articulation of some or all of the members of that culture with those forces which are believed to structure and govern the universe. In terms of usual "Western world" thinking, then, ritual most often and most importantly is of a sacred character and is centrally and instrumentally involved in a culture's "religious" sphere of action and thought.

Those interested in the relationship of ritual to theatre have long since noted attributes of ritual in traditional (non-state level) societies which have formal correlates in theatre. Ritual involves portrayal and performance, often a performance space, and performers. Ritual frequently includes the use of masks, makeup, costumes, dance and music. It most often involves an aggregation of people which might be conceived of as an audience (Brockett 1984:3), although certainly a highly participatory one.

Theatre

Whereas the data base concerning the character of ritual has been drawn from a wide variety of traditional societies, publications concerning the pristine character and origins of theatre have relied most heavily upon sources of information about the societies of pre-Classic and Classic Greece.

In a general sense, theatre may be conceived as comprising what is performed, the performance itself and the audience. What is performed may be dance, musical drama, variety entertainment, mime, the improvisation and portrayal of a story involving impersonation and dialogue, or the acting out of a written script including plot and character portrayal (Brockett 1984:4). It is this latter aspect of theatre which corresponds to the common meaning of the term and which is the focus (but not exclusive interest) of those persons who have seen a genetic relationship between ritual and theatre. The perfor-

mance itself is conducted by individuals trained in the art of portrayal and takes place in a designated performance space. In theatrical presentations the audience is one of onlookers (or "hearers" as the etymology of the term implies) and does not, with rare and mostly contemporary exceptions, directly participate in the action.

Recognition has long been given to the fact that theatre, now and in classical Greece, is not merely a means of entertainment but also one of instruction. The audience is ultimately instructed that the universe is coherent (or is not), that the institutions and *mores* of the dominant segments of society are (or are not) the appropriate ones to observe for the ultimate well-being of the individual and the society. "It was not out of childlike naiveté that the Greeks asserted that the artist was a teacher" (Kitto 1971:vi). Theatre, notably the dramatic theatre, addresses the validation of cultural institutions, societal hierarchies and values. The functional correlations with ritual here have not escaped notice in past formulations of a genetic relationship between ritual and theatre.

The usual focus on pre-Classic and Classic Greece as the locus of the origins of theatre emphasizes the observation that early theatre involved a portrayal of the actions of deities, other supernatural entities and mortals. This focus assumes then, the sphere of "religion" in a Western world sense. The secularization of theatre is viewed as a relatively recent phenomenon in the Western world and one not occurring at all in an indigenous manner in non-Western theatre.

The Relationship of Ritual to Theatre as Previously Conceived

The earliest often cited reference to a belief in the emergence of theatre (the dramatic theatre in this case) from ritual, is to *The Poetics* of Aristotle. He indulged in the historical speculation that an innate human tendency to mimesis at some point in the human (Greek) past fused with religious belief to produce ritual which in turn gave rise, at the beginning of what we call the Classic period, to theatre (to drama, most relevantly to tragedy). This position seems to have set the tone for subsequent treatments of the relationship of theatre to ritual, in that the former is always seen to be a derivation of the latter. The "how" questions surrounding this development have received various treatments. In the brief examination of ritual and theatre under the above headings there certainly is sufficient commonality visible in the two phenomena to lead analysts, past and present, to posit a "genetic" relationship between the two. Clearly perceived differences of scale, of structure, of general content of performance, and the participatory nature of the "audience" have resulted in the maintenance of a conceptual distinction between them. Detailed correspondences in structure, social functions, and even to some extent general content, plus the "religious" content of ritual and early theatre

have, however, led not illogically to viewing the two as lying within the same realm of endeavour. The vector of the arrow of change was set in accordance with the long established fact that in those societies where theatrical performance arose, the presence of ritual activities was always chronologically prior to and remained concurrent with the establishment of theatre. The notion of ritual arising pristinely from theatre is therefore not encountered.

If it be accepted that the character of the main body of previous analyses of the relationship between ritual and theatre has been one in which the two are held to partake of the same essence, and in which theatre has in some manner been seen to rise from ritual, then it remains to address, if with some brevity and no pretense of completeness, the kinds of approaches which have been taken to an understanding of the character of that birth.

Aristotle's position was that drama, in particular, tragedy, emerged from the dithyramb of the Dionysus cult rituals of Heroic and of early Classical Greece. The dithyramb was a choral poem in honour of the god Dionysus, with the ritual led by a male figure who came to represent Dionysus or some other divinity. Having taken on this masked persona as a character, the leader begins to improvise through mimesis and dialogue as a focal point for the gathered participants in the Dionysian ritual. Greek tragedy began in this way, Aristotle believed, with the leader's improvisations (note here a departure from the strict "code" nature of sheer ritual) within a performance space serving as an enabling step towards the fully developed theatre of tragedy. At that point strictly coded ritual and communal participation led to the improvisation of theatre and to participants becoming spectators (Hunningher 1961:33-36). Aristotle does not claim Athens as the centre of organization of early tragic theatre, but does claim it as the centre of florescence from minimal developments elsewhere in Greece. There is clearly disagreement among theatre historians as to the degree to which Aristotle relied upon archival sources and upon conventional knowledge for his work. Whether or not based upon demonstrated historical data, Aristotle's mode of explanation of the origin of tragedy is historical, and descriptive, perhaps most closely approximating an answer to a "how" question. So too, is his analysis of the origin of comedy which is seen to rise from ritual phallic songs of ancient Greece.

Nietzsche, in his 1870 ahistorical and visionary *The Birth of Tragedy* views the refined and intellectually oriented "Apollonian" phenomenon of drama as emerging in early Classical Greece from the Dionysus cult's body of ritual and its search for human insights through ecstasy. Nietzsche believed that tragedy came about as an Apollonian means of presenting insights derived through the ecstasy of Dionysian rituals and was accomplished by amalgamating dialogue and individual character portrayal with the Dionysian chorus. Friedrich in his 1983 article "Drama and Ritual" indicates his belief

that for Nietzsche the Dionysian is the central element in Greek tragedy, that "Apollo, in the end, [speaks] the language of Dionysus" (p. 161). For Nietzsche dramatic performance is essentially a form of ritual.

Sir James Frazer, writing *The Golden Bough* at the turn of the century with all the assurance of the nineteenth-century unilineal evolutionist approach, employed as a "data base" a body of myth drawn from a variety of Old World sources. Frazer believed he had struck on a common theme in the myths and rituals of many ancient Old World cultures, particularly the rites surrounding the cyclical dying and rebirth of the year (seasonal cycling). Frazer's "evolutionary" speculation, with pretenses to historical accuracy, sees the year as becoming personified in a year-god, or in some cases a divine king who is ritually slain and reborn in accordance with the yearly cycle. The Cambridge School of Classical Anthropology, which arose just after the turn of the century, took Frazer's argument one step further and posited a subsequent stage of development wherein the year-god was given a name (Dionysus in Greece). He is ultimately given a life-story, a "mythos" (Friedrich 1983:169) and becomes an individualized, personified character generating through the provision of "plot" the immediate antecedent to theatrical drama.

Gilbert Murray of the Cambridge School ends the "evolutionary" sequence by proposing that as the participants in the year-god rites became increasingly separated from the ritual activities they eventually lost faith in the magical efficacy of the rites. They then became spectators and the rituals became theatrical drama for them (Hunningher 1961:37). Both tragedy and comedy were seen to originate, if by somewhat different routes, from these postulated "historical" events. Drama here, as in the instance of Nietzsche, has retained a ritual essence, with ritual and theatre not being viewed as inherently different in nature. The "armchair evolutionary anthropology" of Frazer and the Cambridge School utilized data of myth as attested fact, and assumed as a premise a vitalistic, universal, uniform or unilineal development of cultural phenomena. In spite of the convincing internal logic of the argument, it must be viewed as ahistorical in nature and, in company with Nietzsche's approach "a vision, rather than a theory" (Friedrich 1983:162).

Victor Turner in his book, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), presents the reader with a series of intriguing insights into the nature of the relationship between ritual and theatre. At the outset he warns the reader of the limited insights into such subject matter which may be provided by the positivist and British functionalist anthropological approaches. His approach involves the delineation of the function of social regulation characteristic of both ritual and theatre, and the placement of these two phenomena within an ahistorical evolutionary scheme with an internally convincing logic. His argument, however, is ultimately reminiscent of the

visionary ahistorical approach of the Cambridge School.

Turner focuses on the "social drama," the potential and actual stresses and conflicts between the members and constituent groups of human societies at any level of social complexity (Turner 1982:11). He views the social dramas of any given society as universally divisible into four phases of process. The first breach occurs where interpersonal and intergroup stress or conflicting interests result in disruption of the shared values and integrity of the society. The second phase, crisis, involves the awareness of members of society (particularly those who possess authority) that the conflicts occasioned by the breach threaten social relations or structure. The third phase, redress, involves the invoking of either juridical or ritual processes of crisis resolution. This latter phase results in "an increase in what one might call social or plural reflexivity, the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand, and then act on itself" (Turner 1982:75). The fourth and final phase of a social drama pertains to the reintegration of the social group, or perhaps the overt recognition of schism. Turner sees this sort of beginning, middle, and end of social dramas as structurally isomorphic with Aristotle's analysis of theatrical or stage drama.

Stage drama, Turner indicates at more than one juncture, is associated, if indirectly, with complex state level societies. In smaller scale, traditional societies where stage drama is never present, non-secular ritual swings into operation most importantly during the processual social dramatic phases of crisis, redress, and reintegration. The ritual of ethnographically and historically known traditional societies, and the stage drama of contemporary and historically known complex societies, represent the same functional activities, namely the resolution of social dramas inherent in those societies.

Human "play" is indeed serious business for Turner, as it is for theatre historians. For him, in social drama are embedded the roots of theatre, particularly in the third "redressive" phase, which in traditional societies is implemented by non-secular ritual. In complex societies or "civilizations" (Turner 1982:12) it is implemented by theatre, which he views as a hypertrophy of ritual processes characterized by something of the "investigative, judgmental, law-in-action . . . even 'supernatural' character of religious [non-sacred ritual] action . . . the 'secular sacrum'." Further, both ritual and stage drama have in common the element of "performance" wherein the culturally specific meanings of the conflicts and resolutions found in social drama are drawn out of daily experience and made intelligible to the members of the social group in question (Turner 1982:13-16).

In contradistinction to Nietzsche, Frazer, and the Cambridge School, Turner does not appear to assign central importance to the notion that theatre partakes of a ritual essence. What is important to him is that the two possess common structural and functional features in those societies where they are

respectively to be found.

It seems that Turner has shed new light, in an elegant and convincing manner, on correlations between ritual and theatre in terms of functional identities. In a theoretically non-specific and ahistorical manner, he has set the scene enabling a society to employ stage drama rather than, or in addition to, non-secular ritual in order to implement the phases of his universal social drama. That ritual is chronologically prior to theatre in human societies is a matter of record for Turner. That theatre is in some manner a developmental product of social processes acting on ritual at certain times and in certain places is more than implied by the title of his 1982 publication. The diachronic nature of that developmental process is not made clear to the reader. The following question remains: under what kinds of social, political, historical, and perhaps other circumstances would theatre emerge as the preferable option in "social drama" resolution? The preliminary formulation of an answer to this question is the task remaining to this essay.

A New Anthropological Approach

The foregoing perspectives on the relationship between theatre and ritual, briefly and, it is hoped, not unrepresentatively summarized, present to the reader, either explicitly or implicitly, a scenario within which "historical" or social conditions are met whereby theatre might emerge from ritual. It seems that at best what has been addressed are the circumstances which might enable theatre to rise from ritual—that is, an answer to the "how" aspect of the process. What has not been steadily addressed is the question "why" a transformation from ritual to theatre occurred at those times and in those societies (particularly early Classical Greece) where it did occur, and why such a transformation of the ritual of all societies ethnographically known has not occurred.

In a footnote to his 1979 Radcliffe-Brown Lecture to the British Academy, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," S.J. Tambiah cautioned his readers that: "Certain neo-marxists and adaptation ecologists use the epithet mystification too facilely as an excuse or cover-up for either not seriously investigating or not comprehending ritual symbolism and ritual patterning; they merely see functional and utilitarian uses for ritual action" (Tambiah 1979:153). This criticism aligns with that of Victor Turner (1982:12-13) who decries an exclusively positivist and functionalist approach to the examination of the ritual and theatre relationship. While exhibiting no fundamental disagreement with the position taken by these two scholars, the general nature of the explanatory approach to be taken in this essay is one which views the process of transformation of ritual to theatre as essentially functional and adaptive. The many and complex psychological or emotive dimensions of a full understanding of the nature of ritual and of theatre will not

receive treatment here. They are not of a conceptual order appropriate to the kind of analysis we shall undertake. The answer to be posited to the “why ” question posed in the preceeding paragraph takes the position that the transformation from ritual to theatre occurred when and where it did as an adaptive response to specifiably changed or changing circumstances of the societies in question.

State and Non-state Societies

For some time anthropologists have been accustomed to a classificatory mode of thinking which would relegate all known human societies or cultures, past and present, to one of four taxa based on modes and levels of complexity of socio-political integration. In order of ascending scale of size and complexity the taxa are: band; tribe; chiefdom; state (both archaic or pristine and modern industrialized). Although the differences between band, tribe and chiefdom based societies are many and critical for other anthropological analyses, these three non-state levels of human society may be distinguished in common from the state in ways important to this essay.

The social institutions, groups, and patterned and traditional interpersonal behaviours which characterize the social fabric of all non-state societies are based most importantly on complex systems of kinship affiliation. The relatively small scale of these “traditional” societies permits of the efficient use of a web of kin relationships (often yielding to anthropological analysis only with the greatest of effort) to structure what we in the industrialized world would call the social, political, economic and religious institutions and activities of those societies. In terms of political forces, the semi-autonomous band is egalitarian with charismatic and ephemeral task-oriented leadership.

The political character of tribal societies is one which involves the exercise of a variety of modes of achieved and transitory authority. A trend is visible in some tribal societies to the centralizing of authority relations existing among and between the component local communities (mobile bands or sedentary villages, as particular conditions of life warrant).

The chiefdom, the structure of which is still based fundamentally on kinship relations, involves clear centralization of socio-political and economic authority in the hands of the chief (or paramount chief and local sub-chiefs as the case may be). Chiefdoms are stratified and ranked societies, not egalitarian, but still the chief possesses only inherited political “authority,” the institutionalized right to lead, provided he fulfills his chiefly responsibilities of economic and social control to the satisfaction of his followers. They may topple him from office or break away as a group and move elsewhere if they are not satisfied. The chief does not maintain leadership through force or coercion.

It is at the state level of socio-political complexity where stratified and ranked segments of the society (social "classes") are led and controlled by individuals or groups with political "power"—a monopoly on the ability both to create rules with society-wide application and to enforce those rules through institutionalized coercion. The scale of size and complexity of the state makes it impossible to structure its vital functions through the medium of kinship relations, as most frequently does the fact that states are multi-ethnic, owing to the incorporation of communities with varying cultural backgrounds within their territorial hegemonies, whether through force of arms or persuasion (Cohen and Service 1978:1-34).

Character and Functions of Collective Ritual in Traditional Societies

In traditional societies an understanding of the forces structuring and underlying the functioning of the cosmos, as well as the proper human relationship to these forces, is comprehended by the body of myth which exists within that society. If myths in traditional societies are verbal statements concerning the cosmos, then rituals may be viewed as actions which give symbolic expression to those myths (Leach 1968:185). The myths of a given society are formulations of the belief system characterizing that society. They are the society's narratives of its cosmology and social values (Wallace 1966:74). A major function of the belief system of a society is the conferring of sanction upon the social order or organization traditional to that society. One major function of rituals in traditional societies is the symbolic validation of the extant social order given sanction in myth. Edmund Leach has referred to myth and its ritual performance as "a language of signs in terms of which claims to rights and status are expressed" (1968:198). Distinctions such as profane/sacred or secular/non-secular are frequently made with respect to ritual (see Turner 1982:80). Increasingly scholars have indicated the "culture bound" nature of this largely Western world distinction based upon the observer's frame of reference (Burnett 1976:314-316 and Tambiah 1979:121). Patterned performances which focus essentially on the exposition of the belief system of a traditional society constitute ritual and "the traditional [usual] distinction between religious and secular is of little relevance" (Tambiah 1979:121).

Ritual "represents" the social structure of the society (Leach 1968:183) to its members, particularly those kinds of communal rituals termed "rites of passage" and "rites of solidarity" (Harris 1985:430). Rituals are seen by S.J. Tambiah to confer permanency and legitimacy on social constructs, making these social constructs appear as part of the cosmological order and to express and communicate attitudes which foster ongoing "institutionalized intercourse" (1979:124). The enactment of ritual guarantees social communication. Tambiah further sees ritual as a social construction, ideological and

aesthetic, which functions both as an expression of and as an exercise of authority (1979:153-154). He sees ritual as symbolically representing the structure and function of the cosmos at the same time it links the extant social positions of the participants to their perception of the cosmos, legitimizing and even making necessary that social structure.

Rainer Friedrich, in the 1983 publication of his paper on drama and ritual, indicates that ritual not only reflects social order but that it in fact impresses upon participants that the extant social order is "divinely ordained" (1983:169). The French anthropologist Marc Augé notes that the structures of symbolism present in the myth and ritual of any human society are cosmological statements of the nature of the order of the world and these statements never teach individuals anything but to recognize and accept their places in the cosmos. Ideology is inherent in symbolism from its birth (Augé 1982:64-65). Communal ritual has to do with communication within a group, and takes on central importance in this respect when the scale of size and complexity is relatively small, homogeneity of the belief system is high and non-literacy prevails-conditions which characterize traditional societies. Tambiah sees the ritual form of communication within a society as characterized by some "distancing" of the private emotions of the participants from their commitment to the validation of a public morality symbolized by the ritual. This emotional distancing contrasts with the individual emotional involvement occurring in the instance of direct interpersonal communication (Tambiah 1979:124).

A major function of ritual in traditional societies is the sanctioning of the extant social order, the maintenance of societal integration and therefore of social control, whereby whatever authority structure may exist in a society receives cosmological approbation. There is little room for innovation here in terms of what is communicated. Peter Arnott, writing about ritual and theatre in Japan, describes the function of ritual as "to illuminate something that is already almost completely known. . . . There are no surprises" (1969:102-103). The discourse of ritual is timeless, and the past is projected through varieties of symbolic manipulation into the future. Even the initiates in ritual are traditionally prepared for the course of events and the content of the ritual. Participation in ritual performance, or even observing solo performances of ritual such as shamanic curing, is a major mode of enculturation and thought conditioning in traditional societies.

Character and Functions of Theatre

Victor Turner characterizes both ritual and theatre as aspects of "cultural performance" (1982:13). The theatrical mode of cultural performance in any fully developed sense occurs in association with the state level of socio-political integration as described above. State societies are characterized, as

are traditional societies (as previously defined), by the presence of ritual. The previously indicated central importance of communal ritual in traditional societies is not mirrored in state level societies due to the increased scale of size, the complexity of ranked, segmented social hierarchy and the multi-ethnic composition characteristic of state level societies. These dimensions of statehood militate against the kind of homogeneity of subscription to a belief system and potential for total group participation which impart to ritual, in small scale, kinship organized traditional societies, its efficacy as a mode of maintaining social order and control.

State societies, as previously indicated, develop legitimized modes of coercion (police, army, militia) to enforce rules generated by the power elite. Such coercion is, however, far from the sole means exercised in state level societies to bring about behavioral conformity on the part of the members of state society. Preferable to coercion, is "thought control" in support of the ideological and social status quo (Harris 1985:321-327). Harris sees the major mode of thought control in preindustrialized states (Aztec, Inca, Ancient Egypt, Classical Greece) as residing in the elaboration of state religion, producing theocracies in which the social order was sanctified.

In modern state contexts, the consciousness of members is manipulated through media such as movies, television, radio, organized sports and importantly through universal public education. Through such means "certain political viewpoints so essential to the maintenance of law and order" (Harris 1985:323) are transmitted by direct instruction, or through strong implication, to observers and participants. The authors here accept the position that, with particular reference to its various times and places of origin, theatre has as a major function the conditioning of the thought of members of state level societies in support of the existing social order.

Thought conditioning is a means of social control less threatening to the acceptance of the governing powers than physical coercion. That many theatrical productions in the Western world have for some time clearly sallied forth against the social order and the "status quo" is further demonstration of the widespread recognition among persons of a reflective nature of the role of theatre in the potential manipulation of the social order. None of this is to say that all theatrical performances have as a conscious purpose thought conditioning intent upon maintaining or mutating the social order. However, in productions where no such intent exists, the tacit acceptance of extant social order and underlying belief system is most often clearly discernible in the content of the production.

Few would take argument with the position adopted by Peter Arnott that "theatre is the microcosm of society and the history of any drama is bound up with that of the audience for which it was written" (1969:33). He further indicates that, historically, the content of Japanese theatre and the restrictions

placed upon it have since earliest times been attributable to political manoeuvring, as was the case for fifth-century B.C. Greek theatre “for all its vaunted freedom.” Here we are clearly in the domain of theatre and social control. Alvin Kernan, with reference to the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes’ “The Frogs” repeats the observation that “plays are only of value insofar as they serve the state” (1979:146). Victor Turner, without specific reference to state society and theatre, makes the observation that “the actors on the stage almost seem puppets on [social] processual strings” (1982:99).

Herbert Weisinger, writing with specific reference to tragedy, sees this form of theatre as manifest when:

the accepted order of things is fundamentally questioned only to be the more triumphantly reaffirmed. It cannot exist where there is no faith; conversely it cannot exist where there is no doubt; it can exist only in an atmosphere of sceptical faith . . . [further] . . . the tragic protagonist, in whom is subsumed the well-being of the people and the welfare of the state, engages in conflict with a representation of darkness and evil; a temporary defeat is inflicted on the tragic protagonist but after shame and suffering he emerges triumphant as the symbol of the victory of light and good over darkness and evil, a victory sanctified by the covenant of the settling of destinies which reaffirms the well-being of the people and the welfare of the state. (Weisinger 1964:103)

For Weisinger, then, the basic structure of tragedy and its origins have come about to legitimize the extant cosmological and social order.

A somewhat different note is sounded in Clifford Geertz’ reconstruction and analysis of the nineteenth-century Bali State. The hierarchically linked constituent state entities of Bali of that century did not employ coercive power as the basis of sound control (Geertz 1980:134-136). The “*raison d’être*” of the state was Theatre—the performance of mass ceremonialism and pageantry. The kings were the impressarios, the priests the directors and the commoners (peasantry) the supporting cast and audience (Geertz 1980:11-17). Theatrical presentations were not intended to support a power group controlling the state. Rather, theatrical performances set the example of the behaviour desired of all members of the state, where that behaviour was supposed to be modelled upon the structure of the realm of the supernatural. According to Geertz, therefore, the role of power differs, in the case of Bali, from its role in the early Greek, Japanese and Aztec states. The role of theatre, however, is constant in all four instances—the conditioning of thought and thereby, of social behaviour, and the avoidance as far as possible of the need for coercive control. Geertz tells the reader that scant data are available concerning those Bali state societies preceding the development of the nineteenth-century Bali state structures. Historical data on the early emergence of Bali theatrical performance would therefore be unavailable.

George Szanto, in *Theatre and Propaganda*, views theatre (now and in the past) as propaganda, defined as "activated ideology" (1978:6). The most commonly occurring form of theatrically activated ideology is what Szanto terms "integration propaganda," where the effect of the production is to render the audience and society passive, accepting of the present social order, and conditioned "to not challenge the authority of those who perpetuate the dominant and ongoing social institutions." In contemporary popular Western world theatre, the propaganda function is usually indirect, "although occasionally directly planned" (Szanto 1978:9). Szanto's presentation of the reinforcement of extant ideology and social order through theatre has the contemporary Western world as its empirical referent. Mention is made that the works of Aeschylus may be viewed in this context as well (Szanto 1978:8). That a direct planning of integration propaganda characterized the origins of Greek, Aztec, and in likelihood other theatre, is a proposition to be presented subsequently in this essay. Szanto's statement (1978:13) that "producers of integration propaganda are usually institutionalized elements of the society" will be seen to hold even greater relevance for those times and in those places closer to the origins of theatre, where the great majority of the audience was not literate and where direct audio-visual performance means of communication were paramount.

In small-scale traditional societies ritual communicates approbatory information concerning the cosmos and the social order of a given human group. Although ranked segments occur in the more complex orders of traditional societies, particularly in a chiefdom, it is only at the state level that large scale groups are formed on the basis of class and ethnicity. The hierarchical ranking of such groups may be described as a pyramidal structure of power relations and access to resources. Theatre may be seen as a mode of communication between groups comprising state societies, a mode of communication of particular importance in the instance of the early formation of archaic (non-modern, pre-industrialized) states where the level of popular literacy was very low. It will come as no surprise to the reader to encounter a suggestion that a reaffirmation of the state society's belief system and the concordant social order is a major focus of what is communicated. Information, opinion, "propaganda" in Szanto's sense, is being communicated from the apex of the state power structure down to the sub-groups comprising the body of the membership of the state, a membership characterized by pronounced differences in access to political power, resources, and by differences in ethnic origin.

Attendance at theatre can clearly serve to foster a sense of community and to serve as a defence against alienation from the social order. The aggregation of attendants will, to a greater or lesser extent, cross-cut the sub-groups comprising the membership of the body politic. Independently of the

content of the theatrical production, the fact of aggregation in common purpose (perhaps the notion of being “entertained” is the primary motivation for audience attendance) promotes a sense of pan-state social solidarity. This point is not likely to be missed by a power structure seeking to promote a closing of the ranks behind the social status quo. As Peter Arnott observes with respect to Classical Greek theatre: “The structure of Greek theatre symbolizes a communal activity” (1969:109). The physical structure of the Greek theatre place itself, placement of the stage area, rank ordered seating arrangements, were a direct reflection of the social order of the time.

Table 1
Some Basic Features Undergoing Transformation in the Development of Theatre

Communal Ritual (Traditional Societies)	Theatre (State Societies)
Symbolic behavioural expression of cosmology, belief system embedded in body of traditional myth.	Symbolic behavioural expression of and possible reflexive commentary upon the value system and cosmology of a state society.
Sanctions and legitimizes the social order through conditioning of the thought of the society’s members.	Sanctions and legitimizes the the social order (integration propaganda) or conversely, questions that order (agitation).
Socialization and enculturation mode of exercising ongoing social control and integration.	Mode of social control, ongoing enculturation and socialization, promotion of integration of segments of state society.
Social communication among members of a culturally homogeneous group, small in scale of size and complexity and characterized by non-literacy.	Communication between heterogeneous class and ethnicity based groups, with multi-community organization on a relatively large size and complexity scale.
Innovation potential relatively low with respect to structure and content of performance.	Comparatively high innovation potential with respect to structure and content of performance.

The Transformation from Communal Ritual to Theatre

Table 1 represents a side by side comparison of some of the commonalities in basic structural and functional attributes of traditional communal ritual and theatrical performances. The commonalities of expression and character visible in the features paired on the right and left sides of the table are homologous in nature. This results from the proposition that each of the features in the theatre column of the chart is an “evolutionary” transformation of the

oppositely situated communal ritual feature. In the case of each feature, the same kind of function is implemented for traditional societies as is for state societies. The transformational processes relative to each of these features paired in Table 1 are dealt with at appropriate junctures in the text.

Table 2 employs major aspects of a conceptual scheme devised by Anthony Wallace for the description of basic structural and functional elements of ritual (1966:58-71). These elements are seen by Wallace as occurring jointly or in variable combinations which may be specific to any given ritual performance. This schema is useful for a comparison of features (more specific in nature than the contents of Table 1) of traditional communal ritual and theatre which possess a commonality in structure and function. Once again, these commonalities are viewed as homologous in nature, with the theatre version of each listed and described element viewed as an evolutionary transformation of the communal ritual version of the element in question.

Subsequent treatments in this essay of the historical and genetic relationship between ritual and theatre adopt the position that under specifiable circumstances surrounding the emergence of statehood certain critical social functions, which in traditional societies were met by communal ritual, can no longer be implemented by ritual alone. Under these circumstances theatre emerges through the transformation of (and not discontinuous change of) some of the structural and functional features of communal ritual such that those transformed features may more efficiently meet the adaptive exigencies of emerging and ongoing statehood. Theatre is thus viewed as transforming communal ritual but certainly not as eliminating ritual in state societies. Using biological analogy for a moment, an organic species which has been transformed through branching processes of biological evolution may temporarily coexist with the ancestral species from which it has evolved. So it is with theatre and ritual. State level societies where theatre is present will still be characterized by the presence of ritual which functions to support the integrity of component segments of those societies. However, the scale of size, the hierarchical complexity, and multi-ethnic composition of even early state societies limit the use of participatory communal ritual both in communicating among such a society's total membership a sanction of the social order and in exercising social control through thought control or conditioning.

There are many cases in the ethnographic literature which demonstrate that traditional communal ritual is not static, but is characterized by the ability to incorporate innovation and improvisation. It nonetheless possesses a low potential, relative to theatre, for innovation in structure and context of performance. This does not suffice to meet the exigency of variability in specific content of performance, which emerges from a need perceived by authorities in state societies, to address potentially socially disruptive issues

Table 2

The Transformation of Some Major Elements of Ritual in the Development of Theatre

Communal Ritual (Traditional Societies)	Theatre (State Societies)
Joint communal performance of ritual acts of (at least) local group of the society. Participation the hallmark.	Audience separated from performers as non-participants in staged events, special performance space.
Explicit assertion of the "truths" of the belief system, including cosmology and moral injunction.	Script/dialogue/action is a reflection of the accepted moral and social order of the society, sanctioning or inveighing against the values and social order of the society, explicitly or implicitly.
Participant leader(s) of ritual with expertise beyond that of society members, an intermediary between them and the forces of the universe.	Trained performers, the protagonist of drama, the other major characters, the chorus and its leader of the Classical Greek stage embody aspects of the members, of the audience, represent them.
Symbolic paraphernalia, representational compressed statements of principles of belief, infused with the power of the referent ("Fact").	Costumes, masks, makeup, stage set, other paraphernalia ("Fiction").
At least some (perhaps great) alteration of mental and emotional state of participants (through drugs, dance, music, chanting), perhaps the reaching of ecstasy, certainly the dissociation of the individual from daily life with the individual acting out a role foreign to his daily life.	Dissociation of members of audience from daily reality, a "willing suspension of disbelief" in reality of staged action, non-participatory in terms of stage action with actors implementing roles through which an audience member may (or may not) feel identified in terms of the "social drama" subject of the staged exegesis.
Human behaviour simulating the behaviour of spirits or forces and bringing about that behaviour, indirect control of a realm not directly apprehensible.	Representation, with the desired intent not of manipulating the controlling spirit forces of the universe but with manipulating the behaviour of staged characters to simulate the predicted outcome of the behaviour of those characters when they conduct themselves in accordance with or inveigh against the ideology and social forces of the state.

in such a manner as to render their subjects passive. Theatre is directed to communication between segments or groups within state societies, heterogeneous groups based upon differences in ranked class, ethnicity and place of

residence (the multi-community aspect of state hegemonies). It is the cosmology and ideology confirming the social order and political hierarchy of a state society which is to be communicated to the other groups comprising the state. The communal ritual of any particular culturally homogeneous segment of the heterogeneous governed populace of the state will clearly not suffice to provide a cosmology and sanction of the social order acceptable to all segments of the state society. The authority structure of the state has the power to shape a cosmology and belief system conducive to the sanctioning of its desired social order, and to communicate that ideology to all segments of the populace. Theatrical performance is by nature not inherently bound to a particular ideology, but has the innovative capacity, through the conveyance by trained actors of scripted ideology to a non-participatory audience, to communicate that the cosmology and sanctioned order which support the authority structure and implement social control are indeed a representation of how things "are" and how they "ought" to be.

It is important to the structures of authority that the members of the society become apprised of the consequences of personal deviation from the behavioral precepts inherent in the state cosmology, and the staged events of theatre portray these consequences. The members of the audience, however, are free of risk during the performance, are onlookers, are made to feel, one and all, members of a greater state community whatever their own social statuses may be, and are to learn to want to behave as they must behave to participate in a harmonious way in the social order.

The corpus of myth embodying the cosmology and belief systems of early and contemporary state societies, and to some extent selectively fashioned by the powers of state, is perforce mainly drawn from the historic/mythic past of the most influential groups comprising the state. This has the advantage of creating a situation wherein the irreproachable, sanctioned nature of the belief system and the extant social order can be presented as having their roots in a past which is remote from the current political structure and is ostensibly unconnected with the contemporary profane needs and wants of that structure. The irreproachable cosmological and social order of the past is projected by theatre into the present, the present into the future, and is recommended in the same manner that communal ritual projects and recommends a belief system to the membership of a traditional non-state society.

In the realm of the transformation of communal ritual to theatre, several changes figure prominently. These include transformations from participatory performance to distanced audiences and action on stage, and from communication within a homogeneous group to communication between groups in a complex society. In communal ritual, individuals are dissociated from daily life and offered participatory entry into the realm of cosmic forces; in theatre

the dissociation from daily reality is accompanied by non-participatory entry into represented social action. Ritual is associated with a body of myth, a cosmology and a belief system common in details of tradition to the entire membership of the society: theatre is concerned with a body of myth and belief sanctioning a social order where neither the myth nor the social order are inherently and uniformly acceptable to the inhabitants of a state characterized by class and ethnic differentiation. Finally, we note a transformation from lower to higher innovation potential in terms of the structure and content of performance.

The notion that the transformation from communal ritual to theatre is to be theoretically understood in the context of the emergence and perpetuation of state from non-state societies has been elaborated upon in the foregoing. How do these propositions fit such empirical data as we possess concerning early theatre in pre-modern states?

The Theatre of Classical Greece

The oligarchic and fifth-century B.C. democratic forms of government, characteristic of the hegemonic city states of Classic Greece, represent variants of the power structured state level of society. Greek state society was not characterized by the monolithic structure of state societies elsewhere and at different time periods, but the defining traits of state, ranked class structure, and an ascending order of socio/political power and control, were assuredly present. With respect to Greek democracy Wolfgang Weissleder writes: "individualistic ambition to obliterate status distinctions was not the main fuel of the socio/political dynamic, though the thought may seem heresy today. The universal desire to achieve equality, or the self-image of being equal to others, is a late-blooming flower of culture, to inject it into the Greek world view is an anachronism" (1978:189). Aristotle, speaking to the concept of an ideal form of government, was not opposed to centralized authority and indeed "could well imagine an enlightened and benevolent despot" (Weissleder 1978:189). The need to closely examine the "much vaunted freedom," referred to early in the essay and attributed to Peter Arnott, is echoed by Rainer Friedrich when he notes: "The ancient freedom was essentially of an objective kind, hardly, if at all, developed in its subjective dimension: the citizen actualizing it by fulfilling his duties to the state. . . . When the principle of subjectivity and free individuality arose in Socratic thought and Sophistic teaching, the polis showed itself unable to integrate them; the fate of Socrates bears witness to this" (Friedrich 1983:189). The Greek state was a ranked structure of power but was not despotically ruled by the profligate use of physical coercion. A means of exercise of social control, more amenable to the power structure of the Greek state, would be that of thought conditioning. It is a claim of this essay that theatre as an organized

activity arose in ancient Greece, coincident with the rise of early state level society, as a preferred non-physically coercive means of exercising social control, through thought control, over the heterogeneous class and ethnic segments characterizing the membership of the state. Benjamin Hunningher indicates that many places in fifth-century B.C. Greece claimed to have originated theatre, but it was ultimately within the polity of Athens where theatre, most pronouncedly tragedy, flourished in classical Greece (1955:33).

Basing their views on statements attributable to Aristotle and previously cited here, historians of Greek theatre have long posited a genetic connection with the communal rituals comprising the celebration of the Cult of Dionysus, year-god of fertility and wine. Hunningher relates that "the wild worship of Dionysus gained its characteristic form in the Thracian north, from which it spread all over Greece" (1955:27). The communal cult rituals of Dionysus spread rapidly throughout the Greek countryside and cities: "its tide suddenly became a flood: for this cult was open to everyone; no priest guarded it and allotted grace. . . . Dionysus was the god of the masses" (Hunningher 1955:29-30). The Dionysian cult was known in Athens as in the rest of Greece "in the early times which gave birth to drama in Greece" (Hunningher 1955:33). By the fifth century B.C. there were three festivals each year in honour of Dionysus and at which plays were performed: the Rural Dionysia in December; the Lenaia in January; and the City or Great Dionysia in March (Brockett 1984:36). Theatre was not presented at ceremonials celebrating any god other than Dionysus. The rapid spread of his orgiastic cult of communal ritual throughout rural and urban Greece brought about a common focus in this kind of communal ritual among the diverse communities, rural and urban, of variegated social complexity, ethnic custom, language dialect. The Greek city state held a hegemony over a network of such diverse rural communities through the offering of protection by alliance and the establishment of trade networks. Confederations of city states had in common the observance of Dionysia, a commonality which extended to the ranked segments of the societal structure of each city state. In sum, no other communal rites were characterized by such a virtually universal pattern of distribution throughout the geographically distinct and socially diverse communities of ancient Greece as were the cult rituals of Dionysus.

It seems historically evident in terms of the chronology of events that Dionysian ritual is in some manner connected with the rise of Greek theatre. Rainer Friedrich notes that, with very limited exceptions, e. g. the *Bacchae* of Euripides, known Classical Greek plays (both existing and lost) have nothing to do with Dionysus. As he states: "The Dionysian institutional setting of Greek tragedy with its un-Dionysian nature was a puzzle to the ancients no less than to us" (1983:159). Let us attempt to transform this puzzle into something expected.

Aristotle has presented us with a picture whereby the communally staged dithyramb ritual of Homeric and early Classical Greece with the chorus led, through the leader's mimesis and improvised dialogue, to fully blown theatre of tragedy with all the accoutrements previously described. It is not illogical that this series of events could occur; they, or something very similar, do seem to have occurred. Why would they occur? If we apply the diachronic and evolutionary perspective we have developed concerning the structural and functional equivalencies of ritual and theatre to what appear to be reasonably reliably attested data concerning the socio-political circumstances prevalent in early Classical Greece, the advent of theatre at this time and place takes on fuller meaning. Greek city states, with particular reference to those of early "democratic" Classical Greece, eschewed physical coercion as the first line of maintenance of the social order within the polis. The emergence of theatre represents, to repeat, an alternative mode of social control, thought conditioning. The Dionysian institutional setting for the first presentation of theatre, of plays, was the only setting in which all the members of ancient Greek society aggregated in different regions, different communities, different cities at about the same times of the year, for the same communal purpose—the celebration of Dionysus. The assembly of large numbers of people, cross-cutting different social segments, in one performance place witnessing the dithyramb, in which participation was much less the order of the day than for other Dionysian rituals, may be seen as a precondition and opportunity which might be seized upon, or perhaps only gradually realized, by the authority structure of the state. The opportunity exists to inculcate in the audience of variously ranked citizens, visitors, "foreigners" and any others attendant, a cosmology and belief system sanctioning the extant social order. To this end, fully blown theatrical performances with scripted dialogue, characterization and symbolic paraphernalia were sponsored by state authorities (Knox 1982:21). As Brockett says: "The state paid the actors, supplied their costumes, and furnished the theatre in which their plays were performed. . . . Thus financed either by wealthy [powerful] citizens or by the government, [the performances] were looked upon as a religious and civic function of such importance that during the festival no legal proceedings were allowed and prisoners were released [to attend]" (1984:38). Admission was minimal, or free for the penurious, and everyone had the right to attend.

The figures who walked the stage of Classical tragedy (the most frequent and central form of drama): "far from being contemporary, were men, women and gods from the far-off past, from the dim beginnings of the youth of the race—an age of heroes and heroines, the legends of the beginning of the Greek world. The stuff from which the tragic poet made his plays was not contemporary reality but myth. And yet it did reflect contemporary reality, did so in terms that were perhaps more authoritative because they were not col-

ored by the partisan emotions of the time'' (Knox 1984:22). It was in fact the authority figures of the state who established the theatres and funded the productions. They also provided the personnel from whom were selected those officials who decided which productions would be mounted (and who therefore decided content) and which plays won the competition which was the matrix of the presentation of theatre at Dionysia.

More than one theatre historian has indicated, as has Rainer Friedrich, that ''the decisive step towards drama was the inclusion of heroic myth'' (1983:171). The eclectic theatrical use of selected myth from a non-partisan past to construct, communicate and reinforce a cosmology sanctioning the extant social order would seem to aid immensely in the explanation of the fact that early Greek theatre had recourse to the Heroic past and not the present to construct plot and develop characters which at the same time were made to have explicit or implicit contemporary relevance. Bernard Knox notes that the myths upon which Greek theatre is based deal with the time of pre-city state heroes and in the original myth what happens to those heroes is what is important (1984:24-25). With the advent of state-sponsored theatre the old myth is set against a city background and the fate of the social order of the city state assumes a transformed importance. The chorus is always present, and frequently reminds the audience of these political issues, often representing the interests of the state. Kitto indicates that in the theatre of Classical Greece, the focus of a play is not necessarily the hero. Rather the plays are intended to indicate that there is a coherency in the universe, that in the play the audience is seeing universally valid principle in action (Kitto 1960:233-235). Such principles are by their very nature concordant with the interests of the state.

By way of example let us look briefly at the plays of Aeschylus, the earliest Greek dramatist whose plays were not lost. In his *Oresteia* trilogy Aeschylus examines the growth of the concept of justice. Athens was then a burgeoning city state and the need for a state administered system of justice was being felt by the authorities (Vellacott 1956:15-20). In the first two plays, *Agamemnon* and *The Choephori*, social control and justice are seen to reside in the more ancient Heroic period's device of personal revenge. The flaws in this mode of the administration of justice are made apparent in these two plays. In the final play, *The Eumenides*, justice is seen to most appropriately reside in the hands of the powers of state which can reconcile the old order with the newly developing state order and administer ''tradition with progress'' (Vellacott 1956:19-20).

In florescent Athens, days of theatrical presentations involved the staging of tragedies dealing with ''timeless'' issues, followed by that other form of drama, comedy, dealing in a contemporary manner with the political satire of affairs of state. The character of Old Comedy is such that an origin com-

mon with tragedy in the Dionysian dithyramb seems acceptable to most scholars (Hunningher 1955:39). As Christopher Reaske writes: "There are enough similarities of purpose—defining man as both an individual and a member of society—for comedy and tragedy often to have worked towards similar points" (1966:8).

In ancient Greece, then, theatre emerges from specified circumstances of communal ritual: "it became drama when it had nothing to do with Dionysus any more" (Friedrich 1983:190). It served as a mode of creating and maintaining the social order desired by state authorities in their wish that unity and integrity of the body politic, and not individuation and segmentary autonomy, be the order of the day. It is of interest to note in passing that this abhorrence of individuation and "dismemberment" and the resolution of those conditions characterized the theme of the Dionysian dithyramb.

The Theatre of the Aztec State

The Aztec state encountered by the Spanish "conquistadores" in the early years of the sixteenth century had evolved from chiefdom to state level society within the two centuries prior to European contact. This newly emerging conquest state was structured complexly along class lines and according to aspects of kinship structure which were the imprint of the social structural essence of the immediately antecedent "traditional" chiefdom. From a point in the early fifteenth century, the Aztecs under the leadership of a "divine-right emperor" (Berdan 1982:100), moved out from their capital city Tenochtitlan (now buried beneath Mexico City) and, through warfare and threat, incorporated peoples of various ethnic backgrounds within the Aztec State.

In Tenochtitlan and other urban communities under the direct ordination of the Aztec power structure, social control was of many kinds. A centralized hierarchy of legal structures and of courts was brought to bear where necessary. In general, however, "wayward behavior was discouraged or controlled through the enculturation process" (Berdan 1982:96). In the context of enculturation in the Aztec State, the proposition appears again in this essay that theatre functioned powerfully in this regard. In this multi-ethnic, multi-community, class structured state society, theatre may be seen to emerge as a way of communicating and recommending to the component segments a cosmology and belief system devised by the power elite. As Marvin Harris has said in connection with the Aztec State: "One way to achieve conformity in stratified societies is to convince commoners that the gods demand obedience to the state" (1984:445). Such ultimately becomes the message of Prehispanic Aztec theatre.

The Aztec were marauders of twelfth-century north-central Mexico who made their way down to central Mexico, attached themselves through marriage to a royal lineage of the then recently disintegrated Toltec state and added convenient portions of Toltec myth to previously existing Aztec cosmology. They thus legitimized to themselves, and to others, their right to state level hegemony in central Mexico as inheritors of the Toltec tradition of rule. "They assimilated a plethora of other deities long resident in the Valley of Mexico and beyond. . . . As the Aztec state accepted, absorbed or conquered other peoples, it also adopted their gods" (Berdan 1982:125). Thus, different deities became patrons to the different ethnic groups and class segments of Aztec society, as well as of the different component residential communities (Berdan 1982:124). The original deities of the invading Aztec, along with those of the Toltec affiliates, ranked highest in prestige in the Aztec pantheon, with the deities of subject ethnic groups and communities lesser ranked but still incorporated into a created body of myth which sanctioned the social order of the state. Aztec deployment of mythology was, thus, similar to Greek manipulation of myths of the Heroic Age to suit the needs of an emergent state society. In both cases a cosmology was devised which was ostensibly and to all appearances not centrally based on the immediate political needs of the ruling elite, but rather reflected a divinely ordained social order sanctioned by the myth of an unassailable, if "doctored," past and directly attended to the need to address the multi-ethnic composition of the state.

María Sten, in *Vida y Muerte del Teatro Nahuatl* (1982), insists that one must view Prehispanic Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs) theatre not as simple diversion but as a tribute conducted before spectators to the sacred order of the invisible powers of the universe (1982:17). Many Spanish chroniclers of sixteenth-century Mexico have described Aztec theatre as encountered at the time of conquest or later recounted by informants. Hernán Cortés, leader of the first wave of conquerors, described a theatrical performance in a market square in Tenochtitlan. A Jesuit priest of that time, José de Acosta, described a theatrical performance conducted in a thirty-foot square performance space within the great temple to the major Aztec god Quetzalcoatl (Sten, 1982:22).

Frances Berdan writes: "Also, with song and poetry, the Aztecs occasionally created dramatic presentations. . . . The participants would often disguise themselves to assume special identities. Deities, jaguars, eagles . . . and the neighbouring Huastecs were common disguises. Some of these dramas were amusing, others serious. . . . In other religious dramas, such as the one dedicated to Tlaloc [a Toltec deity], priests and perhaps students would enact a dialogue between the deity, a priest, and the populace" (1982:158). Some participation by the audience from the sidelines occurred in these instances.

Sten reports that special places existed for performances, dances, song and rehearsals, as in a professional theatre. She views public, communal ritual as having gradually evolved ("convirtiendose") into dramatic action (1982:26). Her extensive research demonstrates clearly for Prehispanic Aztec theatre the presence of: court and popular theatre, religious and secular; the existence of special performance places; performers' schools; dress rehearsals; the use of masks, makeup, costume and stage set elements; texts of written dialogue.

As in the Greek instance, Aztec theatre developed in the context of widespread communal ritual celebration. The very important functional parallel of Aztec with early Greek theatre is seen in the statement that Aztec theatre had as a central function the embodiment, presentation and profaning (creating contemporary relevance) of myth, even transcending it. The spectator received a new perception of personal truth or reality in the reality and truths presented by the myth (Sten 1982:33).

The rationale for the involvement of Aztec state powers in the sponsoring of performances is summarized by Brian Fagan's statement: "The major ceremonies [of which theatre formed a part] were elaborate, carefully organized productions conducted in eye-catching settings intended to impress spectators and to promote loyalty to the gods that stood behind the community, the city and the state" (1984:250).

Judith Lynne Hanna, examining the Aztec dance/drama as one example of the relationship between performance art and political thought and action, hypothesizes that dance/drama in prehistoric Mexico was used as "a communicative symbolic system to create, reflect, and reinforce social stratification and a centralized, integrated political organization encompassing diverse, geographically dispersed ethnic groups" (Hanna 1979:151).

Sten cites the work of Miguel Leon-Portilla on Prehispanic theatre. This scholar distinguishes four stages of Prehispanic theatre which coexisted until the time of the Spanish conquest and which appeared chronologically in the following successive manner (Sten, 1982:32):

1. The most ancient forms of dance, songs and theatrical performances which became established in the dramatic action of the ceremonies in honour of the gods;
2. The different kinds of comic and entertainment performances by such as jugglers, prestidigitators, acrobats;
3. Staging of the great Nahuatl (Aztec) myths and legends;
4. The presentation of what we would call, by analogy with Western world theatre, comedies or serious drama with an argument relating to the familiar social problems of life.

In the light of earlier theoretical discussions and of the previous examination

of the emergence of early Greek theatre, this developmental sequence of the emergence of theatre from communal rituals or ceremony is hardly surprising. The power structure of the Aztec State, having created a mythical cosmology suitable for its own sanctioning and perpetuation, gradually created a form of theatrical presentation involving more individuation of characters. Its audience become spectators. The theatrical presentation of mythological principles in action serves ultimately to condition the thought of audience members and enhance social control.

Conclusion

Anthropologists and theatre historians have long viewed theatre as somehow emerging historically from the rituals of traditional, non-state societies. Previous explanations of this developmental phenomenon have at best posited historical circumstances of the elaboration of ritual which would contain structural, and in some cases functional, elements seen to be present also in theatre. This commonality in terms of some attributes of traditional ritual and of theatre has been viewed as allowing, or setting the scene for the emergence of theatre from ritual. "Why" this might occur has been a question highly conspicuous by its absence.

This essay has attempted to demonstrate that functions common to communal ritual in traditional societies and to theatre in state societies reside at the heart of any answer to the "why" question. It has been posited here that traditional communal ritual and state theatre each function to express the cosmology and belief system of those societies in which each is present, sanctioning the extant social order and implementing social solidarity and control. For traditional societies, culturally or "ethnically" homogeneous, small in scale size and complexity, and organized along kinship lines, communal ritual implements these functions admirably. In the case of the much larger, more complex, class structured, multi-ethnic, power-based state society communal ritual has been shown inherently incapable of implementing these functions. Theatre emerges, employing many of the structural elements of earlier communal ritual, adding new elements of structure and performance to communicate to preponderantly non-literate component segments of the state a belief system congenial to the perpetuation of the extant power structure.

These precepts have been applied to attested data concerning the character of "cultural performances" and the socio-political circumstances surrounding the newly emerging states of Ancient Greece and of the central Mexican Aztec. The results of this preliminary testing of our approach against these data is encouraging in that the anticipated order of transformational events seems to have occurred in each instance. A more detailed examination of the Aztec and Greek situations is in order and is currently being undertaken by the authors.

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