INITIAL THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS
OF NOH THEATER IN DRAMA THERAPY

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Shortly after I started my theater studies in 1965 in Helsinki, I was introduced to mask pantomime. I can still recall the first time that Antti Tarkiainen, my mask pantomime teacher, introduced me to the "classical" (neutral or universal) and "character" masks designed by Antero Poppius. The powerful metamorphosis caused by putting on a mask, then slowing down and stylizing the movement in pantomime to improvise expressions appropriate to the particular mask, created a state of mind which, for the first time, made me understand why some tribal societies give magical attributes to masked rituals. I could see a visible transformation take place in the person who put on a mask. He or she not only assumed another character through movement and pace, but also seemed to become one with the mask in the process. Such experiences and insights with masks kindled my imagination and unconscious curiosity.

In 1967, a Japanese theater ensemble visited Helsinki for the first time; this was my initial encounter with Noh Theater performance. The slow mixture of dance and mime of "Jido," the little boy who was the main character of the Noh play Kikujido left me perplexed. The stylized language of the ritualistic and mysterious Noh does not easily disclose its meaning to the occidental audience, or so I thought then. I later realized during a 1972 visit to Japan that in the cultural transfer to Helsinki, the performance had lost some essential parts of its original power. Nevertheless, the impact of that original experience in Helsinki led me to seek, five years later in Kyoto and Tokyo, further understanding of Noh and Kabuki theaters.
The 1972 Noh Theatre performance I attended in Kyoto was a spiritual and transpersonal experience. Chanted to music, the Japanese language, which I did not understand, revealed its ancient wisdoms. The actors' control and centered sense of being communicated messages about unusual realms.

The performance I attended in Kyoto was traditional, and no English translation was available, even for the plot. Consequently, I did not know the name of the play, nor could I understand the dialogue. Yet, the performance was a turning point in my career, for the essence of the play was transmitted to me without language.

Time stopped when the shite, the main character, masked as an old woman, entered from the kagami-no-ma or greenroom (dressing-room), and started to progress majestically down the hashi-gakari, the bridge-like extension that led to the stage. The seven-meter walk must have lasted ten minutes as this master of discipline, concentration—and paradoxically, simultaneously humility and superiority—literally moved inch by inch to the stage. The shite did nothing else but walk, yet he was not only able to maintain my electrified astonishment, but also to intensify it at every step. The illusion was magical. There seemed to be no mask, just the wisdom of an old grooved face, radiating tremendous beauty and self-esteem, and emanating the power to raise consciousness far beyond the actor’s physical boundaries.

From Japan I went to Britain to study Eurythmy, a therapeutic method using slow-paced movement and a spiritually focused sense of reality. In that context, I experienced a fleeting centeredness and unity with the universe that were apparently related to, among other things, the slow pace of the movement and the emphasis on being aware of others while in motion. I recall, however, being concerned that masks were not used with movement. My intuitive need to use masks started to surface at that point.

After returning to Finland, I read Ze-ami's (1363-1443) \textit{Kadensho}, one of the twenty-three treatises he wrote for Noh actors. This reading and the experiences in Japan set a direction for my experiences with masks and mime, and in 1973, my proposal to experiment with mask pantomime therapy in an institution for the mentally retarded, in Finland, was accepted.

This application of art and drama \textit{therapy} was initially developed in Finland between 1973-1976 through a process that uses painting, drawing, mask-making, movement, panto-
mime, and mask-pantomime techniques. In addition, specific procedures derived from Japanese Noh Theater, such as slow motion, masked mirror-self confrontation, character and mask identity processes, mask pantomime, and catharsis, are the primary features of this drama therapy approach. It is the combination of art, drama, and Noh Theatre practice that constitute the key elements of the drama therapy I am using currently.

KADENSHO IN MASK PANTOMIME THERAPY

Ze-ami's Kadensho has been my primary guide in interpreting Noh Theater. In Kadensho Ze-ami presents teachings inherited from his father, Kan-ami, which center on the significance of spiritual growth in the Noh actors' training. The minor differences reflected in the variety of schools of Noh, such as Kanze, Hosho, Kita, Komparu, or Kongo, need not concern us here. Instead, I will explore the significance of the style of movement; the use of mirrors, masks, and slow motion; and the meaning of Yugen and their interpretation as synthesized in drama therapy.

Masked Mirror-Self Confrontation

In Japanese Noh
Opening of the curtain
Shite's masked face
Transcending persona
Projection by me and him

Projection is an essential feature in the use of masks and pantomime in the drama therapy presented here. Maruoka and Yoshikoshi (1971) describe Noh actors' contemplative preparation in the greenroom as follows:

The actors have an almost worshipful respect and awe in the presence of a mask. It is only after the actor has been completely dressed and has contemplated his own appearance in the mirror of the greenroom that he accepts the mask, lifts it up, bows his head in greeting, and has it secured on his face. Up to the time the mask is put on, the actor is still himself, but from the moment the mask is in place, he considers himself completely transformed into the character he is to portray. The actor is taught that he is not to put the mask on, but that he must put his whole self, body and soul, into the mask (p.118).

The projection which occurs in the Japanese Noh Theater performance is described in other terms by Ze-ami. He
provides detailed instructions on how to act in front of different audiences: "In any form of activity, the most important thing is to harmonize the yo (positive principle) and yin (negative principle)" (1970, p.38).

Actually, in the Japanese Noh, the shite's awareness of himself and the audience appears to reach unusual levels of sensitivity:

Here I must mention Riken-no-ken and Gaken-no-ken in Zeami's Kakyō. With our physical eyes (with Gaken-no-ken) our range of vision is limited to left and right and front, but with Riken-no-ken one can see behind one, which is impossible to physical eyes. In other words, Riken-no-ken is to see oneself dancing through the eyes and mind of the audience, going beyond Gaken-no-ken. It is difficult to see one's entire figure objectively through the depth of one's contemplation, seeing in front of one with the eyes and in back of one with the mind. This is made possible by establishing one's center, and is the artistic basis of the three dimensional relationship between the artist and his audience. These principles are the seeds of all high art, because they produce a union of subject and object (Zeami, p.7).

In Noh Theater, the shite creates the microcosm while contemplating his character, finally becoming one with his mask and newly created reality. When the shite enters the stage, the projections on to himself, and identification with him by the individuals in the audience, together with his Riken-no-ken, expands his microcosm to include the audience. This expansion takes place to some extent in live theaters all over the world. In Japanese Noh Theater, however, slow pace, stylized dance and mime, music, and even the architecture of the stage are still deeply rooted in Buddhist temple traditions. The overall atmosphere of the theater, the slow pace, and the unique ritualistic style of performances create a oneness between Noh actors and the audience.

Centeredness and unity with humankind, without losing one's own identity and uniqueness, is one of the philosophical foundations of this drama therapy, lending it a transpersonal quality. In addition, the use of slow motion, masks, character and mask identity processes, masked mirror-self confrontation, stylized movement, cathartic processes, and mask pantomime offer techniques that can facilitate spiritual growth.

As an essential part of the process, a mask is put on in front of a mirror. At first, masquers face the mirror and have their backs turned toward the group. This enables each masquer to contemplate, in the mirror, his/her character indicated by the features and style of the mask. This is the time to unify the mask with the rest of the body and define the characteristics...
displayed by the mask; in other words, to project one's "body and soul" and spirit into the mask.

In the masked mirror-self confrontation (MMSC) phase the masquer utilizes unconscious and conscious projection techniques. In this process, projection does not refer to unconscious defense mechanisms and the attribution of one's faults to others, rather it refers to the attribution of one's personality traits (both positive and negative) to a selected character and mask. The projection occurs especially during the MMSC processes and throughout mask pantomime expressions. During character and mask selection, mask making, as well as in the beginning of MMSC, the projection may be unconscious. When confrontation occurs, a reflection in the mirror feeds back the unconscious projections; the masquer may become aware of his/her projections. An important consideration here is that seeing those projections is not too threatening, because the mask provides a kind of security, some "protection," and functions as a concrete means of defense.

Unconscious mental images (personality traits, conflicts, wishes, etc.) are projected on to the mask, on to the mirror, and on to the viewing audience. When the masquer has completed his/her contemplation before the mirror, he/she turns toward other participants and the therapist. The projection then reaches out to the audience or the group, which in turn counterprojects its unconscious or conscious material back to mask and masquer. This cyclical process tunes into the microcosm of the masquer and the microcosm of the entire group.

The masked confrontation of self in the mirror reinforces the perception of selected, but still often unconsciously identified and projected, features of one's character. The selection of the character and mask is a crucial step which requires perceptiveness and sensitivity on the part of the therapist. Most of the time, however, the client will select the appropriate mask him/herself.

A classical (neutral or universal) mask amplifies the wearer's own motor habits, posture and movement, such as sitting, walking, standing, holding things, and relating to others and the environment. On the other hand, a character mask can be used to focus on a selected feature of the wearer's personality, and give him/her an opportunity to observe that feature in an emphasized manner during MMSC.

In this drama therapy, the interplay between group members, whether they are masquers or audience, is emphasized. Masks
can provide a surface or screen also for the projection by the audience which may differ from that of the masquer. Consequently, discussion between or among the participants is an essential part of closure of each session. During these discussions, it may become apparent that cathartic experiences have occurred both in the masquers and in the group.

Catharsis

When I first experienced the therapeutic powers of the Noh Theater performance, especially as projected through the masked shite's character, I felt an emotional cleansing, a letting go of past tensions, and the replacing of negative uncertainty with positive inspiration and goals. This was an "aha experience" that brought to consciousness my previously unconscious thoughts about the therapeutic and transpersonal power of masks. This insightful moment occurred as I was passively observing a Noh play performance, one which I could only understand through non-linguistic channels. Perception apparently stimulated unconscious needs, thoughts, and imagery, which I then projected on to the shite's character and masked being, thus bringing these needs, thoughts and images into consciousness, with a resulting catharsis. This kind of catharsis is not defined here exclusively in psychoanalytic terms. Beyond the release of symptomatically tense and anxious material by acting it out, catharsis here also refers to an attainment of emotional resolution or a kind of emotional purification at any level that leads to insight and growth. It can be experienced to varying degrees, either actively (MMSC, mask pantomime, etc.) or passively (by observing, listening, or reading meaningfully identifiable material).

The cathartic elements in this approach to drama therapy depend on the experiences of both masquers and audience. The selection of personally and individually relevant material—whether a play’s dialogue, short story, fairy tale, or one’s own written life experiences—is a crucial step in the process. The content and the characters of the story line facilitate the processes of identification, MMSC, mask making, mask selection, and acting out through mask pantomime, which in turn, leads to catharsis. Individual participant’s readiness, honesty, and openness are prerequisites for the experience of cathartic release and resolution, which may vary in degree and in intensity.

Various forms of therapeutic release and insight, spiritual and personal growth toward centeredness—not self-centeredness—are essential goals in the initial drama therapy approach. Slow
motion and gesture has a calming effect which also enhances relaxation, which is the major prerequisite for not only a genuine dramatic self-expression but also for many transpersonal experiences.

**Slow Motion and Gesture**

Noh actor's motion
Slow sliding feet on cypress
Shite's character
Mirroring the audience
Universal in you

Slow motion is an essential feature of this approach to drama therapy. The gesture language in Noh Theater is so highly stylized and symbolic that it follows a totally different vocabulary of movement than the Western mask pantomime. Its stylized dance and symbolic mime, which is performed in slow motion, is more subtle than its Western counterparts. Literally *monomane*, the Noh term used for miming, refers to the imitation of reality, not the concrete or superficial, but the "universal within the individual under its general aspects" (Zeami, p.8).

Since the drama therapy approach described here has been utilized, so far, with people raised within the Western culture, the specific and symbolic Noh-monomane (mime) would have been too difficult and alien to utilize. Consequently, a Western style of mask pantomime has been allowed to permeate the process. The occidental pantomime is purposeful, stylized, simplified, and an exaggerated imitation of reality that relies heavily on the imagination of the pantomimist and his/her audience. However, when masks are used with pantomime, the expression changes. To effectively create the illusion of a total character and to fuse the masked face with the rest of the body demands a slow pace, considerable discipline, and specific selected movements. Thus, slow motion, as initially inspired by Noh Theater, still serves as one of the therapeutic processes used in this particular form of therapy.

**Masks**

In Noh Theater performance, only the shite, the main character, wears a mask. Both universal and character masks are used. The actor chooses the mask to match his personality, his interpretation of the character, and his acting style. The actor often contemplates his choice of mask and costume for days.
The traditional respect for the spiritual powers of Noh masks are clearly illustrated in the previous quotation by Maruoka and Yoshikoshi. The masks are often centuries-old treasures and are handled with respect and awe.

In my use of masks in drama therapy, a selection of theatrical rubber and paper masks varying from universal to character to grotesque is offered to the group. The variety of both character and universal masks ensures the maximal options in the character identification process. Eventually, mask making is introduced to the group. First, the participants come to a common consensus on a particular script, story line, scene, fairy tale, or dramatization of their own life scene, which will be adapted for the drama therapy. Then they select a particular character, for which they make a mask. The mask making process is a long one. A sculptured hump or mold is first prepared and then a papier-mâché mask is built on the mold. Necessary steps are taken to make the masks functional and durable. How advanced the participant is in his/her cognition and perceptual motor skills determines whether or not the mask will be functional. The masks, made or chosen, will, however, provide diagnostic insight into the participant's emotional-spiritual character and identity. Here, the use of masks is essential. They culminate and synthesize the procedures of MMSC, slow motion, catharsis, character and mask identity processes.

**Yugen**

Yugen is a Japanese term, difficult to translate, which refers to "elegance" and "beauty" which can be achieved through harmonizing contrasting aspects of yin and yo in all experiences of Noh acting. Strenuous self-cultivation, unifying the spiritual and physical, sadness and happiness, negative and positive, actor and audience, can result in yugen in Noh acting.

In the symbolic expression of yugen, Noh attempts to express spiritual as well as physical struggles in human relationships. Yugen means "trying at the same time to express the dynamic powers and rhythmical beauty of sculptured movement in an extremely simplified form" (Ze-ami, p. 4-5). Yugen is an essential element in this drama therapy approach, using slow motion, mime and improvisational dance as forms of dramatic self-expression.

**CONCLUSION**

"Hana" (flower), a term used by Ze-ami in his Kadensho as a
means of understanding acting, refers to all seasons of flower, the whole growth process of a person, and stages of life. One's creative expressions vary and change according to one's age, and yet stay the same. Ze-ami insists on staying true to one's own self-expressions. He points out the contradictions of hana as being the very essence of variety, while simultaneously existing as an unalterable form to be maintained. "This seeming contradiction is reconciled by the intensification and purification of one's center: (Ze-ami, pp.7-8). From a more contemporary perspective, Ze-ami's insight can be understood in transpersonal terms to mean essentially the same thing as transformation of consciousness (Wilber, 1979), as reflected in changing self-identities ranging from persona to unity consciousness.

REFERENCES


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"intensification and purification of one's center"