

## **RECLAIMING CULTURE INDIGENOUS PERFORMERS TAKE BACK THEIR SHOW**

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### **ABSTRACT/RESUME**

In August of 1982, theatre groups from around the world gathered in Peterborough, Ontario for the Indigenous People's Theatre Celebration. Some polarization developed, primarily between "culturalists" of the developed nations and the more politically involved groups of the Third World. The Celebration concluded with a concept of unity in diversity, and a recognition of the value of theatre in various forms as a means of combatting cultural genocide.

En août de 1982, des troupes d'acteurs du monde entier se sont réunis à Peterborough, Ontario, pour le Festival du théâtre des peuples autochtones (Indigenous People's Theatre Celebration). Lors de cette rencontre, certaines différences d'opinion sont apparues, notamment entre les interprètes dits "culturalistes" du monde développé et les troupes politiquement engagées du Tiers-Monde. A la conclusion du festival, un esprit d'unité s'est quand même établi parmi les divers éléments de l'assemblée, qui a reconnu à l'unanimité la valeur du théâtre comme moyen de lutte contre le génocide culturel.

The Indigenous People's Theatre Celebration which was held in Peterborough, Ontario in August 1982 was the second of what is hoped to be a continuing tradition of indigenous peoples' theatre celebrations. The first was held in Toronto in 1980. Its inspiration came from Jim Buller, the director of the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts (ANDPVA) - a Toronto-based Native organization which supports the training of Native actors, the recruitment of Native actors for TV and film, and the promotion of Native cultural activity. Buller was turned off by the eurocentrism and the racism he experienced at an international amateur theatre festival and decided as a result that indigenous people needed their own theatre festival.

The 1980 celebration in Toronto was an ambitious start. It brought together seventeen groups from ten countries and provided the basis for on-going contact among groups. Its major drawback, however, was its location in a huge metropolitan area and its emphasis on public performances largely catering to non-Native audiences, which tended to reify it as a tourist commodity, a show-piece of exotic talent.

The 1982 celebration tried to overcome these limitations. It took the event out of Toronto and located it in an area with the heaviest concentration of Native reserves in Ontario, trying to make it more accessible to Native people. It played down the public performances and went back to the original idea of providing an occasion for Native people to celebrate their culture - to come together, to share their skills, experiences, concerns and aspirations, to explore ways of supporting one another and to perform for each other. Public performances remained as part of the programme but they were no longer the central focus.

Invitations were sent to groups all over the world. Instead of going through official government channels, as had been done in the first celebration, ANDPVA contacted groups directly, thus assuring the participation of groups which, due to their involvement in Native political movements, would never be on the official list of government-sponsored folkloric showpieces.

The Celebration opened on the shores of Curve Lake (10 miles north of Peterborough) as part of a much larger celebration among Native people in the area, their annual two-day pow wow.

This was the high point of the week: art as celebration and participation with no artificial division between performer and audience. As the Ainu from Japan put it, "Festivals are not something you look at. You participate, you get involved, you dance, you enjoy life." Everyone took part in the opening circle dance, both conference participants and pow wow celebrants. It set the tone for the rest of the day in which short performances by conference participants alternated with pow wow dances in which everyone joined. Once the pow wow was over and the Celebration shifted to the concrete corridors of Trent University, some of this communal spirit evaporated. The labyrinths of modern architecture and the formality of meeting rooms created barriers to communication which only evening sessions at the bar seemed to overcome.

But one cannot simply blame the architecture. There were very real differences among the participants and it is to their credit that instead of bury-

ing them and preserving an artificial and unproductive consensus, they brought them into the open and debated their varying positions: towards culture, the definition of indigenous peoples and the role of indigenous peoples' theatre.

A quick look at the list of participants and their diverse backgrounds and activities will show the difficulty they had in finding some common ground.

They included:

From Latin America and the Caribbean:

- Ecuador: a cultural group of Shuar Indians whose performances were closely linked to the Shuar struggles against land-grabbing and colonization of the Amazon region;
- Bolivia: Luis Rojas, one of the organizers of a movement of Quechua Indians in the highlands of Bolivia;
- Nicaragua: four peasant organizers representing the Nicaraguan campesino theatre movement, MECATE;
- Dominica: Carifuna, a cultural organization of young Caribs who function as the cultural arm of a Carib political movement.

From Asia and Africa:

- Bangladesh: Mamunur Rashid, a member of an urban theatre group which has recently started organizing drama among landless agricultural workers;
- India: two folk drama groups from Maharashtra;
- Nigeria: two Arts Council officers and the Minister of Culture for Benue State, one of whom presented a paper on indigenous puppetry.

From the Pacific:

- Australia: an aboriginal dance, drama, and musical group, and Bob Maza, the founder of the first aboriginal theatre group in Australia;
- New Zealand: Tim Karetu, a Maori studies professor and cultural organizer;
- Japan: a musical group of the Ainu, a small indigenous minority group on the northern island of Hokkaido.

From North America:

- U.S.A.: Spiderwoman, a professional women's theatre group from New York who develop pieces from their own urban-based lives; Indian Time Theatre, a group from Niagara Falls who tour Native reserves with politicized plays; and a traditional dance-drama group from the Eight Pueblos of New Mexico;
- Canada: four "amateur" community theatre groups, and students of ANDPVA's summer theatre school.

From Europe:

- Denmark: Tukak, an Inuit professional theatre company and theatre school concerned with the development of Inuit actors for theatre work in Greenland;
- Norway: a cultural group representing the Same;
- Wales: a nationalist musical drama group.

How to Bridge These Differences

As one participant put it, "We may all be indigenous people but we are so different." The surface differences were the first to be noticed. Some participants, for example, could not understand why white-skinned performers from Wales and Samiland (northern Scandinavia) had been invited to an "indigenous peoples' " event. The instinctive feeling was that "indigenous peoples" were people of non-European racial background. The Welsh and the Same defended themselves not through argument, but through their own performances which testified to their history of colonial domination and cultural oppression and their struggles to preserve their unique identity in the face of a homogenizing cultural offensive by the nation-states into which they had been absorbed. Once this had been shown, the barriers came down and they were treated as full participants.

Other differences became apparent much later. Some groups are officially sponsored by their governments; others operate without government funding or support and in some cases are faced with repression from their governments. While certain groups have rigid theatre hierarchies, others are collectively run. Some groups are just getting started, while others have a long history: Some make their living out of theatre, performing on a full-time basis, and others survive through other means, performing only in their spare time. Some live largely within the mainstream culture, for example, Spiderwoman in New York, while others operate in both worlds, Native and mainstream. Still others, such as the Shuar in Ecuador, live on the margins of the dominant society, and are trying to contain its influences. Some have high levels of formal education and long involvement in western institutions, while others have grown up largely within the Native culture, learning their skills and developing awareness through informal means and indigenous institutions.

Some are performers and some are animateurs, involved in organizing cultural participation by others.

Ayni Ruway of Bolivia do theatre as a communal, highly participatory activity with no specialization in performance. Some groups perform largely for mainstream audiences, while others perform exclusively for Native communities. Some do theatre as a means of building up Native identity, others do theatre to animate specific forms of social action.

In spite of all these differences there was an attempt to find some common ground, to listen to each other, to discover what was shared in common, and to explore ways of working together as a "movement" to support one another.

### The Structure of the Celebration

The Celebration was organized around four types of activity, performances, critique sessions (colloques), workshops, and discussion groups.

All participants attended the evening performances which were held in a public auditorium, with three or four groups performing each evening. In addition, groups took turns giving performances during the day in the downtown mall and in a public park.

The performances included traditional dances, songs and ritualistic cere-

monies, newly created works incorporating indigenous myths and traditional performance elements, "non-traditional" pieces dealing with the problems of urban Natives, and docu-dramas on the struggles of Native people. The themes of colonial invasion and resistance were the focus of many of the plays, both folkloric and non-traditional

Critical sessions were held every morning in plenary, during which time the performances of the previous evening were critiqued. Two theatre professors, Anatol Schlosser of York University and Jerry Thurston of the University of Calgary, chaired these sessions.

Theatre workshops were in session throughout the entire Celebration (in the afternoon and in the early mornings), with a number of workshops running concurrently. Workshop topics concentrated on the technical aspects of theatre, including such activities as mask making, theatre games, and movement exercises. Small group sessions were planned for the first three afternoons of the Celebration, giving participants a chance to get to know one another, to talk and share experiences in a less pressured setting. This informal exchange of experiences, approaches, ideas and concerns was meant to break down barriers and to overcome parochialism in order to encourage people to learn from each other and to search for common ground. These discussions were also meant to encourage participants to contribute some input into the final congress (of the Indigenous People's Theatre Association) - a more democratic way of planning the development of IPTA than leaving the responsibility solely to the theatre directors, as it had been done at the first Celebration.

It was not to be. It represented too much independence for some of the theatre directors, and as a result of some effective lobbying after the first session, the remaining two sessions were cancelled. One director said categorically: "My actors don't have much to say. They just want to perform."

While it's true that for some participants the group discussions did not work - they were too formal or they were dominated by the more articulate - their cancellation and replacement with theatre workshops left only the colloques in the mornings to bring out the social and political aspects of theatre. In effect, it left no occasion for talking about the ideas, the content of theatre, the situation of the participants in their home countries, their struggles to defend themselves, or their use of theatre in relation to these struggles. It also meant that the preliminary thinking for the IPTA Congress was again delegated to a committee composed of theatre directors.

The colloques also drew fire, but for different reasons. Some participants resented having their performances critiqued by two non-Native theatre professors, as a contradiction of the idea of Native control. The irony of the situation was that the focus of much of the professors' criticism was on two groups, *Tukak* and the Native Theatre School, which were led by non-Native directors and whose pieces, according to the professors, were heavily influenced by western theatre conventions.

This controversy, over what represented indigenous peoples' theatre fixed the polarities in terms of stylized syncretic drama vs. untainted folkloric performances, both within a "culturalist" perspective. It obscured the focus on and

ignored the richness and variety of the Third World groups, many of which were not "performance-oriented", and for whom these standards were completely inappropriate.

It limited discussion to the forms of performance and pushed aside the more important issues of the context, role, and process of theatre. In effect, it represented a monopolistic hold which the European theatre traditions have over people's consciousness, and their understanding of what theatre can be. It ruled out the whole universe of participatory theatre activity of the Bangladeshis, of the Bolivians, and of the Nicaraguans whose theatre is not mere performance, but part of a broader process of community interaction.

### Definition of Indigenous People

The search for an agreed definition of "indigenous people" began during the first session of group discussions and continued on in the steering committee meetings and the Congress. In the first discussion it was felt that oppression had to be part of the definition: "indigenous people" are people who have had an experience of colonial invasion, occupation, exploitation, and cultural oppression. Participants thought that the definition should include the notion of resistance, of indigenous people fighting back to defend their own culture, to resist economic exploitation, and to regain control over their land, their economy, and all aspects of their lives.

A "Fourth World" group wanted to push the definition further. According to them, indigenous people are those who a) are the original inhabitants of the land, and who b) remain without political control over the political-economic system in which they are living.

This definition identified the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the "tribal" or "aboriginal" groups of India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Philippines, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, but it excluded the whole continent of Africa where "indigenous peoples" have had political, though not economic control for the last two decades, and the newly independent islands of the South Pacific.

### A Common History

The pre-colonial life of indigenous peoples was highly integrated. Theatre was an organic part of the life of a community rather than an aesthetic commodity separate from other social activities. It was education, celebration, therapy and religion: a means of socializing the young, affirming identity, building communal solidarity, recording the community's history, healing the sick, communing with and propitiating the gods. Theatre was life and life was theatre. There were no playwrights, directors, theatre buildings or formal rules. Theatre was created collectively, as a direct expression of the people who created it.

Colonialism attempted to destroy this integrated and collective approach to life and to replace it with the system of North Atlantic capitalism. Its object was to invade and dominate the indigenous peoples, taking over their land and

economic resources and securing their labour.

This invasion was resisted. The Native peoples of North and South America, for example, put up a strong resistance, but were eventually beaten down. The Caribs in the West Indies fought back fiercely and delayed colonial control over Dominica by two centuries. According to Carifuna, it was during this period of on-going guerrilla war that the Caribs lost much of their traditional performance culture. There simply was not enough time to keep it going, and tradition died with each Carib killed.

Each colonizing power not only destroyed the economic base of the indigenous people, but attempted to destroy the possibilities of counter-ideological resistance. The colonized were denied any means of expressing themselves, suppressing cultural expression which challenged the colonial system or served as a rallying point for anti-colonial struggle. For example, in both Latin America and Samiland, drums and other musical instruments were destroyed and offenders were punished with fines and flogging. In the case of Samiland this resulted in the total elimination of drumming and dancing.

The church worked hand in hand with colonial authorities. Whether their objective was cultural or ideological (for example, extending Christianity to the "heathen"), it served a clear economic interest in the destruction of any forms of culture which could be used in organizing resistance against the new kinds of production (slavery, forced labour, cash crop production, etc.) introduced under colonialism. Through these efforts religious practices which had been expressed through these "performances" were undermined, and the churches' own forms of worship and cultural practices were put in their place.

The suppression of the indigenous peoples' "performance" culture not only undermined the spiritual basis of these societies, but also their communitarian structure. This was true for example in the banning of the Potlatch ceremonies of the Nootka and Kwakiutl Indians, which undermined their key socio-economic institution, a mechanism for raising production and redistributing economic surplus.

The indigenous peoples' language was also suppressed and replaced with the colonizers' language. This was equally true in the experiences of the Welsh, the North Americans, the Latin Americans, the Sami, and the Ainu. All talked about experiences of being punished for speaking their own language in school.

The object in all cases was to break the spirit of the indigenous people, forcing them to accept a subservient role, - to "know their place" in the colonial racial hierarchy - so that economic surplus could be extracted with a minimum of resistance. Economic exploitation and political repression had to be reinforced with cultural and spiritual genocide. Indigenous people were socialized through the church, the schools, and other means to denigrate and reject their own culture and to accept the colonial system, which justified colonial expropriation of Native land and labour as a "civilizing mission." They were taught that their own culture was "primitive folklore"; that of the colonizers' was "art."

This dynamic, however, was not one-sided. The indigenous peoples continued to fight back and to defend their land, their livelihoods and their

cultures. While some succumbed to genocidal and assimilationist pressures, others continued to resist, and cultural expression played an important role in reviving identity and rallying support for struggle. The Ghost Dance of the 1890's, for example, provided a powerful revitalizing and unifying ideology for the Sioux in trying to overcome their spiritual debasement and oppression.

For indigenous people, the situation today remains largely the same. Their cultures remain objects of denigration, official censorship, anthropological study, or tourist attraction. Their cultural, linguistic, and spiritual heritages are increasingly threatened under the assimilation pressures of dominant societies. However, within them still resides the seeds of resistance. How this resistance is expressed and organized is the major question facing the indigenous peoples' theatre "movement" today.

### Cultural Theatre Versus Engaged Theatre

Participants agreed on some of the broad goals for indigenous people's theatre: to rescue it from extermination or external manipulation, to revive it as a source of identity and as a means of resisting cultural assimilation and to use it as a tool of protest against oppression: They saw their work as recovering, reviving, validating, and advancing the indigenous peoples' culture and history as part of the larger struggle by indigenous peoples for land, freedom from exploitation, and control over their own institutions and lives.

Where they differed was in tactics. Some found themselves trying to revive indigenous themes, symbols and performance forms within a western definition of theatre: theatre as commodity, as something separate from the rest of life, with specialization, hierarchical structures, individualized expression and a separation between performers and audience. Others, like Ayni Ruway of Bolivia, were trying to develop theatre from within their own culture, to revive theatre as part of communal life, as something organically related to the struggles of the community, with active participation, collective expression, and little separation between actors and audience.

The former looked at theatre as a finalized product developed for the indigenous community; the latter viewed their theatre as an on-going process controlled by the indigenous community in which the whole community were involved in the production process and in the production of meaning. The first saw its job completed with the end of a performance; the second viewed their work as beginning long before a performance began, and continuing after it was over.

The first saw their theatre as universal pieces which could be performed anywhere, for any audience; the second viewed their work as meaningful, primarily within the context in which it was created. For example, the first piece prepared by Frente Sur, a campesino theatre group in Nicaragua, was developed in response to the victimization of one of their fellow workers who had been fired by the patron for taking a little bit of milk. The show inspired the campesinos to confront the patron. While the play could have been performed in other places, its primary meaning was for the people of that particular

community.

The polarity between these two positions tended to be a North-South one, a bifurcation between the First World and the Third World groups. These two tendencies emerged as the week went along, with the "culturalists" dominating the event during its early states (before Luis Rojas and the Nicaraguans arrived) and the "engaged theatre" perspective gaining strength the later stages.

While in general there were two camps - those who saw their work as being essentially "cultural" and those who saw their work as being more closely linked to a larger political struggle - the differences and the variations between them were much richer than a simple dualism would portray. There were several polarities rather than a single culturalist-engaged or product-process set of oppositions. There were even more perspectives from which to view indigenous peoples' theatre than the suggested categories set out in the background documents for the Celebration (ritual, means of preserving tradition, source of identity and awareness, a tool of protest or social action). The following paragraphs attempt to set out the spectrum.

#### The Roles of Theatre

For each of the groups, theatre is a source of identity, a means of strengthening the spirit as a pre-condition for survival and self-defense. Their cultural heritage and cultural creativity are asserted as a way of overcoming colonial conditioning and negative stereotypes, and of gaining the self-respect and self-confidence needed to confront oppression and the pressures of assimilation. It is a defense against the inroads being made into the consciousness of people by the schools, the media, the church and other institutions.

Some groups express this identity on behalf of other indigenous people. Other groups, however, organize their theatre in a highly participatory way so that people are expressing themselves and asserting their own voice and identity. For these groups, the growth in self-confidence and identity is not something which other people can do for them. It can only come from acting and from being the subject of the transformation rather than the object of someone else's action. These groups attempt to maximize participation in drama to overcome the western notion of theatre as a monopoly and to break down the separation between actors and audiences.

The latter position represents an assertion or validation of the culture of people which has, under colonialism, been denigrated as "folklore." It says that peasants and workers, not just the dominant class, can make culture and transform the world. In some cases, as in Nicaragua and Bangladesh, it is a reappropriation of what had been stolen from them by the dominant class.

Some groups see their theatre primarily as a means of *preserving or reviving their culture* - as a way of resisting the pressures of assimilation. Their object is not only to keep alive what has been salvaged from the experience of colonialism, but also to renew it, revive it, and develop a sense of ethnic consciousness through it. The Ainu, for example, are attempting to rescue their language, stories and songs which were almost exterminated, and to use them as a means

of teaching their young about their heritage. The use of indigenous languages is a common feature of these groups. Other groups, while sharing this objective, feel that on its own this objective is insufficient, leaving itself ripe for reification as a "museum culture" and failing to recognize the dynamic nature of culture.

Others point out the danger of "cultural nationalism", of accepting tradition uncritically regardless of the values it expresses. They maintain that heritage should be treated selectively, building on those aspects which advance the popular classes and rejecting those aspects which are against the interests of the people.

Some groups are engaged in theatre as ritual, communal celebrations of the beginning or culmination of distant periods of life, such as harvest, and rituals of therapy. One such ritual was demonstrated during the Celebration by the Shuar group from Ecuador. One of their members had not been able to come to the Celebration because of a snake bite just before departure. Participants were invited to take part in a ritual of healing conducted by the Shuar.

Luis Rojas explained that rituals and historical dramas, such as *Inca Re*, continued to be performed by Native peoples after the colonization of Latin America, not only for their efficacy and their function of preserving history, but also as a form of defiance against the conquistadores and their descendants, as a means of showing their resistance. The rituals are neither entertainment nor folkloric exhibition. They are an expression of communal solidarity against oppression and a means of evoking the power of the gods in support of their respective communities.

The Eight Pueblos group from New Mexico warned participants about the potential of ritual being commodified and exploited:

Our culture is strong: we went into hiding because we didn't want non-Indians learning our ways, which is the source of our strength. We want respect: we don't allow filming of some dances. We have a troubled history - of invasion, brutal extermination, elimination of our leadership. We're here to share some of our things but we had to get permission from the elders.

For one group, Ayni Ruway, theatre is totally functional and completely integrated into the life of the community. There is no specialization in performing: everyone takes part and there are no pre-arranged occasions for performance. They happen spontaneously in various social situations as the need arises. This form of participatory drama reinforces the sense of community, helps in "breaking the ice" when two communities come together, serves as a means of expressing what is on people's minds and focuses discussion.

Some of the groups, for example, Tukak, look at theatre as a vehicle for building pride and a sense of achievement among Native people through the discipline and concentration of high-quality, highly skilled theatre. By showing that Native people can excel at theatre, they hope to break down the negative stereotypes about the capacity of indigenous people, building self-esteem within the Native community and winning respect and recognition from the dominant

society, They also argue that to be able to take the Native viewpoint into the mainstream and to articulate Native demands, aspirations and protest to the dominant society, theatre needs to be good. One risk of course is that through dealing with mainstream theatre the group will be forced to accept the standards and values of mainstream theatre. *Tukak*, for example, has adopted Grotowski and Brook presentational styles which, some critics say, limit its power as a voice for the Native community.

For a few groups, such as *Tukak*, *Spiderwoman*, and *Indian Time Theatre*, theatre is a full- or part-time income-earning activity, albeit a precarious one. A majority of the groups, however, are "amateur"; the performers work at other jobs during the day and rehearse and perform in the evenings and on weekends.

For many of these groups, theatre is a highly mobile activity. Plays are toured to Native communities which are normally excluded from mainstream or popular theatre circuits. In other cases, such as Nicaragua, Bangladesh, and Bolivia, theatre is a mass activity with groups based in all parts of the country, and there is thus less need for touring.

Some of the groups are promoting a new tradition of theatre within the Native community. Many indigenous people have never seen "theatre" before. In Greenland, for example, Milsson explained that "there is no Inuit word for theatre, only a word meaning a group of people who have something important that they want to present to other people." Often there is opposition at first, as in Greenland where the influence of the missionaries put up obstacles to *Tukak's* performances.

Theatre for many groups serves as testimony, as a way of publicly presenting those experiences, concerns and aspirations of Native people which are rarely heard by the dominant society. It expresses them forcefully and in a way which cannot be ignored. A good example is *Foghorn* by *Indian Time Theatre*. It expresses the Native movement's experience of repression and resistance in unequivocal terms.

In Nicaragua, campesino theatre is a major form of non-formal education. It is a means of helping peasants understand, adjust to and contribute to the changes brought about by the Revolution. It is an on-going, village-based, peasant-controlled activity which not only expresses peasant concerns, but also deepens their understanding in the process.

For Third World groups theatre is participation with peasants, slum-dwellers and other exploited groups creating their own theatre rather than depending upon externally produced theatre. In Bangladesh and Nicaragua theatre takes the form of peasant drama groups in each village, while in Bolivia it is a highly participatory and spontaneous community drama activity. In all cases it means that an elitist theatre is being supplanted by a theatre of the masses.

In Nicaragua, theatre is a means of inducing participation. Dialogue with the audience is woven into plays and the form encourages them to react: they interrupt, throw in comments, get into scenes and debate issues.

Among some Third World groups, theatre is also used as a means of raising issues and as a forum for community discussion. The performance brings the community together and the theatre group uses the occasion to get people to

talk about the issues raised in the performance.

It is also a process of analysis. It raises questions and makes people think in fresh new ways about their situations, rather than convincing them about something upon which they already agree. It expresses the reality of class conflict, reflecting the structures which shape social situations and revealing contradictions. It is a demystifying theatre, making the unconscious conscious, challenging the ruling class myths of peasant incapacity and the immutability of the world, and showing whose interests are being served.

A key difference between the Third World and First World groups is organization. The Third World groups are closely linked to, or are part of popular organizations. It is this organizational base which makes it possible to extend the range of theatre.

In Bolivia and Ecuador, Ayni Ruway and the Shuar have recognized that their fundamental weapon is organization. However, instead of creating a new organization, they are revitalizing traditional organization, ayllu, which served historically as the rallying point for anti-colonial resistance. It is the unifying factor in their struggles against land invasion, manipulation by middlemen and bureaucrats, victimization, and cultural genocide.

Many of the groups use theatre as protest, exposing and confronting incidents of victimization, exploitation and corruption. For the landless labourers in Bangladesh, theatre is a means of exposing landlords who underpay labourers or appropriate funds from village councils. In Ayni Ruway, theatre is the way through which peasants express their opposition to incursions into their community by bureaucrats, traders, military officials, missionaries and anthropologists. In Nicaragua, campesino theatre provides one means through which the farm workers' unions struggle for better working conditions.

Of course theatre cannot make revolution, but it can be a form of support for revolution. In Bangladesh (1971) and Nicaragua (1975-78), theatre workers eventually had to stop "acting" the revolution and start doing it; that is, they had to take up arms and join the freedom-fighters.

Theatre is not only a means of struggle, it is also a battleground of struggle to see who controls it. In Bangladesh, landlords try to stop rehearsals and performances by sending goondas (thugs) to beat up the performers, and by preventing groups from using public facilities for performing. Once the animateurs leave, they attempt to take the theatre activity over, paying the landless to perform on the landlords' issues. In Nicaragua before the Revolution, campesino theatre groups were the object of repression: for example, Los Alpes had to burn all their props in order to avoid arrest by the National Guard. In the First World control is more subtle: Native theatre groups who are militant lose their funding.

For some of the Third World groups, theatre is animation and movement. The Bangladesh and Nicaraguan participants talked about the importance of developing mass movements of people's theatre. Instead of one group serving a vast population through mobile performances, they have developed an animation approach in which a nucleus of experienced people help form, train and motivate locally based theatre groups all over the country.

This animation-and-movement contrasts with a) the work of say, Tukak, who are putting all their resources into the development of one highly trained theatre company, or b) the situation in many countries such as Canada where only a few Native theatre groups are scattered across the country with no links between them and no regular festivals or events to bring them together.

#### Culture vs. Politics

This polarity between the "culturalists" and the "politicians" was also reflected in different positions towards the Celebration programme. The "culturalists" seemed more interested in practical workshops with an emphasis on theatre techniques. As one participant expressed it: "We've got lots of other organizations to do the politics. We're here to do culture."

The "engaged theatre" camp, made up largely of Third Worlders, resented this idea of "leaving politics to the politicians." For them politics is not just the politics of political leaders, but the politics of movement and participation in which everyone, not just the leaders, understands the issues and the tactics. They wanted to do more than perform, they also wanted to talk about the issues and relate their theatre to their background situation. One of them said:

It's not enough to discuss our common history and traditions. We've also got to talk about the current political and economic situation. In Latin America hundreds of Native people are being killed every day. Why isn't this on the agenda?

Or as the Shuar group commented:

Defending our cultural heritage is directly linked to defending our land. Culture and politics are inseparable.

Of course this polarity reflected the different situations which each group faced. The Third Worlders had direct experiences of violent repression, of organizing for their rights, and in one case, Nicaragua, of taking part in a successful revolution, and so they tended to be more political. The First Worlders had also faced victimization and discrimination, and some had participated in Native struggles, but their experience was in many ways qualitatively different.

As one North American participant, whose formative experience was being told by the FBI to stay away from Wounded Knee, explained it:

In Latin America the repression is more violent - people need to take up guns to defend themselves. Here it's more subtle, yet it's still going on . . . . We can no longer run to the hills and fight a guerilla war . . . . The repression is too strong. We've got to find a much stronger way of dealing with the oppression. Through theatre we can fight back in a different way. Through building our own identity and spirit, and through challenging the way of life

imposed on us, we can build up a more effective resistance, one they won't be able to stop. But if we pick up guns they'll wipe us out.

The polarity also reflected the differing pressures from the dominant culture. In the First World, Native theatre groups are under tremendous pressure to conform to western theatre conventions. In the Third World, peasant and barrio theatre groups have developed their theatre values independent of, and in fact in opposition to, the bourgeois theatre traditions: For example, in the Bolivian highlands, the Quechua movement Ayni Ruway has systematically shut out many external influences, taken control over their own institutions (such as education, health and cultural production), and developed theatre out of their own traditions.

### Unity in Diversity

This polarity was never clearly identified or labelled as such during the Celebration. While there were clear political differences among participants, there was an overriding concern that unity be maintained. People did not evade their differences, which were presented and debated, but on the whole there was no attempt to impose a single unified perspective. People were willing to live with pluralism and with unity in diversity.

The exceptions tended to be the more educated participants, in both camps, who insisted on only one way of doing theatre.

However, the dominant politics was that of pluralism, of unity around a commonly agreed struggle against cultural genocide. If there was a common denominator it was the "theatre of identity," not the theatre of struggle. Participants resisted a sharply defined focus on political action. The Celebration avoided, for example, formalizing ties with the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, which takes a much more militant approach.

It was recognized that simply performing is "political." For example, in the case of Carifuna, plays are performed in the face of opposition from both the Carib community and the Dominican government. By simply performing, they are saying that Caribs are still alive, that they have a voice, and that they will not succumb to further dilution of their culture without a fight.

If there was any political action, it was resistance against the view put forward by Reidar Nilsson, the director of Tukak, that only highly trained, professional groups be invited to the Celebration. This view was countered in the discussions, but the strongest response came on the stage, starting with a spectacular performance on the opening night by the Native Theatre School, (a group of young Native people from across Canada who, in only three weeks, produced a stunning, collective drama), and finishing on the last night with a lively, improvised, show-stealing play by Shuar peasants. These and other "amateur" groups demonstrated that the professional-amateur distinction was meaningless in terms of performance quality.

### What is Indigenous People's Theatre?

The other dogmatic position which was resisted was that of the two colloque leaders who argued that the Celebration should be about indigenous or traditional pieces only, and who tended to dismiss groups such as Spider-woman who used mainstream theatre techniques and dealt with the urban experience of Native people. They also talked about the corrupting influence of western theatre on indigenous creativity.

The colloque leaders' critique was useful in pointing out the dangers of adapting western techniques, of depending too much upon mainstream theatre advice, for example from white directors, and of losing authenticity in slick, westernized stylizations of indigenous performance elements.

However, the participants felt that the focus of the colloque leaders was too narrow and that they should be free to draw on the theatre ideas of all traditions, not only their own.

While they saw the importance of reviving and revitalizing indigenous themes and performance forms, they did not want to be limited to this exercise alone. As an Indian Time Theatre member expressed the idea:

We decided we didn't want to do legends. They're already done on many reserves and they're not done very well. We wanted to do something contemporary, something that would really connect with the people. So we chose a play by a Native playwright about Native struggles, starting with the occupation of Alcatraz and ending with Wounded Knee.

Other participants added that culture was not static, but was always evolving, taking on new accretions and transforming itself. As Dickson Mwansa, a Zambian who helped plan the Celebration, said:

Showing only stylized ritual drama tends to reinforce in the minds of the spectators the Africa of David Livingstone. It makes out that Africa is still as it was: the place of the idyllic noble savage.

Garnet Joseph of Carifuna said they had no choice but to create a new theatre tradition, drawing on other traditions:

Our traditional dances were totally obliterated by 400 years of fighting for survival. There was too much turmoil - running from island to island, fighting to keep the whites away, our people getting killed - there was no time to teach the young our traditions. That's why we've got to reconstruct, to recreate our culture, borrowing on traditions from other groups in the islands.

### Beyond the Celebration

The Indigenous People's Theatre movement is off to a good start. Inter-

national festivals cannot be held every year, however, for they are simply too expensive. What appears to be needed is an additional form of interaction at the regional and national levels. The solid performances by the four Native theatre groups from Ontario and Quebec, the imaginative work of the Native Theatre School, and the enthusiastic reaction by Native audiences demonstrated the tremendous potential for a "movement" of Native theatre groups in Canada.