

Holiday Enabled by Ritual

Appendix B

Naoko Maeshiba Interview

Alec: Can I use your name in my thesis?

Naoko: Yeah, yeah.

Alec: So first, how did you get into theatre?

Naoko: How did I get into theatre? Oh. You mean like, early on? Or a study of theatre?

Alec: Early on, and then a study of theatre.

Naoko: Okay. Okay so early on, I think in terms of the performing arts, I think music came first to me. I always had musical inclination. And I don't mean musical, I mean musical inclination. So, I was singing, like already in high school band, then in college I was also singing so in terms of the stage or performing arts, music came first. But I was also studying literature. I was a book worm, and I really loved reading, and imagining things so that was from when I was a little kid. But how I entered into theatre was not until much later. 'Cause like I said I studied literature, then I studied linguistics, which is the study of language. Like, you are recording like this but, I used to record peoples' conversation. I would transcribe it and I would look at the pattern, you know? Or like pause or silence, you know. Or how people apologize to each other, stuff like that. So I make a scientific study over it, you know? And, at the same time- so that was the performing arts part of me, and another thread was that I was an athlete, and a competitive swimmer for many years. So that physical part was there to begin with, then I started dance, then I started physical theatre, and all of this sort of came together, so that's why I'm doing all kinds of different things, you know? So, I was never really- Well I was doing a PHD program but I switched to MFA theatre, not PHD, 'cause I didn't want to sit all the time and analyze things, I wanted to do things. So, that's how all this past came together for me into- and I thought theatre was the most inclusive, you know, encompassing form of performing arts, you know, so that's how I entered that, yeah.

Alec: How long have you been a director?

Naoko: I think my first stage directing, in terms of I directed- a play directing experience, was, uh, 1996, yeah 1995, 1996, and that was actually when I was a graduate student, and I had translated a Japanese play into English and I staged it, the English premier, so that was my first, directing experience, and since then I've started really getting into directing.

Alec: What would you define as truth in performance?

Naoko: Yeah this is kind of a challenging question. And you wanted to have some examples, so can I maybe ask what you mean by truth in performance?

Alec: I'm, kind of asking you that. I'm trying to connect- so, maybe an actor is being truthful but not the character, or, the character but not- So, I'm, so then I guess the, the, then the question that I'm asking is, "What is the most important kind of truth to you, as a director, to get from your actors?"

Naoko: Oh, to get from my actors. I think for me, it probably comes down to the physical level. Meaning, that full bodily engagement onstage in terms of what I see onstage and perhaps the deep connection with the environment, you know, actor on stage, I mean there are like different layers of truth. In terms of authenticity, are you doing it for real? Is it coming from a deep place of you? I think all these things are important for actors. I mean, you can't really act from a void and pretend to do things. You're actually really doing things. And the source of that comes from the deep, bottom of each actor, right? 'Cause that's where you're drawing it- I mean the core part of it. And then you're relying on these other powers. In terms of the truth in creation, it's about what's important for you, and what's

really important for you, not because someone else told you that it's important, or not because the society tells you it's important, even though the society says that, so and so is really hot topic now, you know, everybody's concerned about that, so just go and you know, create something about that because it's supposed to be important you know? But do you really care about it? Do you really care about it? You know? So that's important for me in terms of truth in creation, if I'm creating something, you know, I don't want to create something because it appeals to the public. I want to create something that's important for me, even if it might not be important for anybody else. And hopefully, by creating something from my truth, that I can find some people who I can connect, you know sharing this experience. So, that's the truth on the level of creation. In terms of what! see on onstage. What's the truth? I don't know, you know? People have different kinds of truth, you know, the audience members. I think it's a question of what the audience believe. Is it- do they believe what they see on T.V. as truth? So, if they believe in that, then, what they see onstage is giving them enough to believe, in connection with their reference point, then it's truthful for them. For me, I think, yeah I mean. It just comes down to the full body engagement, because your body cannot really lie. You might be able to lie verbally but your body cannot lie onstage. So I think that's truth.

Alec: Okay, great. What are the risks and benefits of fear for an actor? Fear of any part of the acting to be done, for an actor?

Naoko: I mean the benefit would be, probably that you can embrace the unknown, you know? If you embrace the fear, you can embrace the unknown. Because stage should really be- not be the safe place. And the stage should be the place that anything is possible. Unless you have fear, I think you cannot enter into that unknown world. So that would be the benefit, probably the benefit of fear. Urn, I don't know, I think it's good to have fear. I mean it's natural to have- I mean the not-so-great part might be that, you don't embrace it. You react to that, you know? You react to fear. So then it's you know and you perceive it as something negative. You know, your reaction to that would be insecurity or, you know closing, you know. Closing versus, you know, this opening option. I have seen this fear and insecurity in many people and I think this is also really natural thing for us to do, even on like Broadway level, you know, working, famous director, famous so and so, is they all have insecurity. Now, this might be actually, now as I'm speaking, this might be actually okay if you are creating from that as a resource. Resource is your reaction to fear, could be the resource of your creation. You create from this point of view. You know if you think of famous painters, or famous, you know, liter- you know, writers, and they you know, something comes out of this closedness. I'm not sure if you're an actor going onto the stage, If you can be- because it's so immediate. The difference between painting and urn, writing and actor being onstage is, painting or writing, there's some sort of distance, you know? Somebody writes this and this goes to published you know? It spreads like this, so there is a bit of distance between the reader and the writer. Acting is so immediate. You're onstage and I cannot avoid this fact that your body is in front of me. This is the main difference. It's a live thing.

Alec: Right. Would you say that also in writing, if created out of walls or insecurities, that the interesting part is that you get to see behind it, and that's why the walls are interesting? That if an actor is supposed to be open and is not, then, why are they there?

Naoko: Right, tight, well you don't have to deny it, you can acknowledge it, you know? Oh, there is fear and I'm actually really afraid of going there. I might forget my lines, this is sort of maybe young actors. You know people have stage fright. Like, I heard that Michael Chekhov, who, he was a great acting, training practitioner, and also director, was a brilliant actor. Really really brilliant actor but he had horrible stage fright. And somebody had to kick him onto stage, you know? But once he was onstage, you know, he was somebody else. He was actually a great improviser, so that caused a lot of problems for his partners, but then he is kicked onto stage, and at that moment he decides that he you know has this persona, he starts riding this completely improvised. Not improvising lines but improvising his whole demeanor, everything. But he was really horrified to go onstage, so this is . interesting, this matter of fear. Is very interesting.

Alec: I have a sort of theory about fear. That if you're afraid, it is always a fear of something in the future that you would deem as bad for yourself. So, you can't actually be really be here now, because you're thinking about the future.

Naoko: Right, right. And if you think about it, what are you really afraid of you know? What are you really, really afraid of? You're sort of conditioned to be afraid of things. What's the big picture? Where is it coming from? If you really think about it? Is that because your director is not gonna be happy, your audience isn't gonna like you, or is it something bigger than that? Who creates the system right?

Alec: Right, 'cause then if the audience doesn't like you, then other people, then, that's really far in the future.

Naoko: Right, right. Of course you have immediate things, you know like if you can't do the job as an actor you know you can't get any work. That's immediate. But is there like a deeper, deeper cause of fear, you know. For that. So that's very interesting. I think there are two things like, where is the fear coming from and what does it do for you? So there are layers of questions about fear. Yeah.

Alec: What do you think rituals role is in theatre?

Naoko: Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Alec: The thesis is that ritual enables fearlessness, truthfulness and ensemble, which are the things that are needed to create holiday, Grotowski's holiday. So, it's not something we just created, we just do it. So, the type of ritual is what defines us. I define ritual as a repeated action that is a path to get somewhere

Naoko: This culture doesn't really have many rituals in terms of everyday ritual.

Alec: No.

Naoko: They do have rituals but maybe they are not so coded or formalized rituals. The culture I come from has a lot of different everyday rituals. And what it does is that, that pulls you out of self, so you're connecting with the outside of yourself, so then before every meal, we have to say- we say something. It's kind of like a prayer but it's a phrase. Before we eat meals. Regardless of your religion. But it's not only connecting to the farmers, it's connecting to the earth, it's connecting to every- you know- I think saying grace is a little bit like that. It's the connecting It's like a small ritual before you enter into this. So ritual seems to be for me, connects what's happening with outside of what's going to happen, the source of it. It seems to have a function of opening up the potential of what's going to happen onstage. And really to bring humility to the performers, you know and, understand the real meaning of what they're doing. For instance in Noh Theatre. The whole thing is a ritual if you really think about it. There are characters, there are musicians, there are story lines. You know, the story advances. The stage is like a ritual, right. Three quarter open to outside, you know they wear masks, there is a sound that flute plays at the beginning, everything is ritual. And what it does is it makes them more like servers. Instead of performers. They're clearly trained performers, but they're serving something. And what are they serving, you know? Of course you know audience are paying ticket, and ticket is expensive, you know, it's like any kind of theatre you see in the west, like, when I go to see the theatre I feel like they are serving something bigger. And we are just kind of participating as audience, in this kind of big ritual you know? And we of course you know appreciate oh he's really trained, you know, he has like 40, 50 years of training, or wow his dance is really great or music this and that but there is a whole sense of debating. We are like participating in something really important you know? So, there is that transcendental aspect, or spiritual aspect, that goes beyond really our understanding.

Alec: Do you think that that's something really important in theatre or is it just, kind of nice?

Naoko: No, I think it's really important. It really actually for me, questions, about, what theatre is, what performance is, and it takes it beyond the level of entertainment. Cause entertainment, if you really thing about entertainment, it's, that stays with you what you know right? It's to satisfy your pleasures, it's to satisfy your- or you learn something. Oh today I learned something a little bit more about the working class scene. Oh that's really

great intellectual satisfying, so you're content in this, you know, you understand and that's really great entertainment. Versus the ritualistic aspect. Ritual is something that connects you to something above and beyond you that definitely connect you but you don't pay attention to usually, but , could be something that you don't understand. But it, to me, I think taps onto the significance of performance.

Alec: Do you think that the third presence being served is necessary for holiday?

Naoko: Yeah, I would think so, yeah. And I think that's the difference between, again the entertainment and the ritualistic performance. You are- you take you out of yourself, you know. It's not so much the cathartic experience you know. You're not crying characters onstage. But everybody's connected to something bigger, you know, more cosmic. I think it's extremely important.

Alec: Without the gods of Ancient Greece that everyone agreed on in the theatre, or like what you were talking about that everyone sort of agreed on the same thing, that in America where most people have extremely different opinions on what to serve, what does everyone server when they come together in the theatre?

Naoko: What does everyone serve? You mean, including the audience?

Alec: Right.

Naoko: I mean it's more clear what the performers are serving. I think it's a reminder, actually. That something about your existence, your own, you know. I saw this Noh play, while I was at this- I mean I saw many Noh plays, but I was at this particular one, was, they did this candle-light you know. So they are inside a space you know, but there is candle-light you know. They are wearing masks you know. There is one person sitting onstage who looked really amazing with the mask, but then I didn't notice that this person came out with a demon mask, who was just standing there, and I looked at this person, and I- under the candle lights. And he really looked like he was a demon. You know. I really thought something came down. You know? Something came down. This moment, really. Something was there. And what does it do for the participants? I think it's a reminder that there's something much bigger than any of us. You know. We can't control everything. Ignoring we came from a big resource. I'm talking about in this case, nature, and spreading the nature, that animalistic way of seeing the world. This is interesting because as I *was* talking about the entertainment, I could be kind of wrong about the entertainment. It could be kind of self-sufficient, you know. There are times, like in the rehearsal hall, or maybe the performance onstage, that you are definitely channeling something. You know. Whether you're doing Arthur Miller or Broadway musicals, there is a moment that you feel like you are channeling something bigger. What's coming out of the scene is not really about the scene. It's not being spoken. In general, actors are like shamans right? You're supposed to inhabit this space, as if it's a real space, you know, with the real air and different kind of smells. That kind of work I think can be only done if you're channeling something much bigger. If you want to talk about truth. I think actor's big job is how to channel that. Everyday. How do you practice channel these things, right? Because otherwise I think it becomes a T.V. you know, where everybody goes to see the theatre, if actors are not trained like that we are just watching T.V. you know. So, I think that that's the difference so what are they serving? I think they are serving to the bigger truth. By being there, participating in the ritual. Does that make sense?

Alec: Yeah, that does. That makes a lot of sense.

Naoko: Yeah, but unfortunately, when theatre becomes business, it's really easy to forget, I think. I you Alexander technique? You've heard of Alexandre technique?

Alec: Yeah.

Naoko: As actors. Feldenkrais was a physicist, he had this very important philosophy, you know. You only have to exercise five percent of your potential to serve the need of your society. So just imagine you own self, serving five percent of your own potential. That's enough to serve the need of your society. So what about 95%? You know? They're only asking five percent of your own potential. This 95% could be something that society doesn't value, or you know, but value in terms of what? Right? I think this is connected to fear, you know, all of this programming. Where is this coming from? Why am I like this, you know?

But this is important, I think theatre can face this matter, you know. If you're very serious about it. Okay?

Alec: Alright. Thank you.