

The Tricultural Tournament

From the one came the two,
From the two came the three,
From the three came the many.

Lao Tzu

This is a proposal to produce a made-for-television event in which six performers from three different cultures compete to create an art of intercultural behavior. By an art of intercultural behavior, I mean wordless interaction that is composed by the performers like a painting is composed by a painter.

Only an intercultural team can win the tournament. Viewers will have the opportunity to identify with different intercultural teams seeking to create an art of intercultural behavior. People from different cultures could then use modifications of this multicultural behavioral art to organize tasks of mutual concern, particularly tasks having to do with environmental interpretation and restoration.

Overview

The Tricultural Tournament is a made-for-television competition for three couples. Each couple will be selected from skilled performers representing three different cultures. According to the rules of the tournament, out of the field of six performers, only a team of three can win. Hence, no couple representing a culture can win, only an intercultural team can win.

In International Olympics, viewers enjoy a one-to-one identification with their representative team. The Tricultural Tournament creates the possibility of something more. Because only an intercultural team can win, the viewer has the opportunity to identify with an intercultural team

seeking to create an art of intercultural behavior. The essential tricultural character of the tournament makes it an appropriate event for many intercultural settings. One can image the Tricultural Tournament as an artistic event at the Olympics, a regular pan-European program supported by the Common Market, a regular program in developing regions of the world, and an ongoing cable TV series in multicultural cities such as New York, Los Angeles, or New Orleans.

Composing Intercultural Behavior

The behavioral performance of each team of three is judged by a three-member panel in a manner not unlike high diving or figure skating. Performers will be judged on their level of achievement in the “art of intercultural behavior,” that is, their ability to “compose” their interaction in four different events. A clear understanding of what is involved in “composing intercultural behavior” for three people is most evident in the fourth event of the Tricultural Tournament, which is called Threeing.

Threeing is a non-verbal way for three people to relate simultaneously. It is a practice, invented by the artist, which works for three people analogous to the way T'ai Chi or Yoga works for the individual. T'ai Chi and Yoga balance a person's well being with a system of changing postures. Threeing balances the relationships among three people with a system of changing positions.

When you are with two people, there is a tendency to choose one and exclude the other. For example, you cannot look into four eyes at once. Threeing provides a simple system of positional choices allowing you to balance your interaction with two people without anyone being excluded. This system of positional choices is like the frame that holds a painting. Within this system, performers from different cultures can balance their interaction the way a painter balances colors. Behavior can be “composed” in movement, gesture, sound and stillness.

Threeing provides a formal way of orchestrating behaviors from different cultures. Behavior is not based on gender, age, race, class or culture but on relationships that emerge from the positions in a geometric figure on the floor. The geometric figure necessary for Threeing can be mapped onto the floor with anything from masking tape to inlaid marble. A performer can change his/her relationship to other performers simply by changing position in the figure. Each performer always has the option of changing positions. Within the figure, the core set of non-manipulative interactions for Threeing are based on things common to the human species, such as, we each have a front and a back, and we all can move and make sounds.

Television and the Tricultural Tournament

The Harvard Professor of Aesthetics, Stanley Cavell, argues that what is special about the medium we call television is that it enable us to monitor events simultaneously with others (Cavell: 1982). Cavell argues convincingly that unlike film, where a masterpiece has a unique status analogous to an artwork, what is unique about television is the format of a show, not any specific instance of the show. Some shows, like sports and news, have formats that are designed to monitor certain kind of events in the world. Other shows, like sitcoms and game shows, both generate events and monitor the events they generate. Events are generated that “work” in a certain format. According to Cavell, with television, the format constitutes the basic aesthetic achievement. The Tricultural Tournament will be an event generated specifically for television and video replay. The tournament will have the unity of time and place proper to an event. Within the overall event of the tournament itself, there are four competitive events. Each competitive event will be shaped according to a repeatable format designed for television.

Selecting the Four Events

The four competitive events were selected by reviewing a body of videotapes I produced in the early seventies. In 1970, I worked with a small group at Roosevelt Hospital's Center for the Study of Social Change, exploring the effects of video feedback on interpersonal behavior. Al Scheflen, author of *How Behavior Means*, (1974) was the leader of the group. I was the gamemaster, responsible for setting up different recording and replay situations. Based on years of research in association with Ray Birdwhistell, author of *Kinesics and Context* (1970). Scheflen has a very grim view of human behavior. He argued that it doesn't matter what poetry is going on in your head, your interaction in small groups is controlled by a very restricted repertoire of behaviors that we share with other mammals: greeting, parting, combat, courtship, territory, etc. In reaction to Scheflen and propelled by personal dynamics, I thought that while he may be right, things need not be that grim. Given video's power to let us see our behavior patterns, perhaps we could "invent" behaviors that would provide more flexibility in our interpersonal relationships. From 1971 to 1976, I produced forty-five hours of video of people experimenting with three-person interaction, trying to "invent triadic behavior". Threeing, described above, came out of this period of experimentation. The four events proposed for the tournament were selected by watching these tapes and identifying what sorts of interactions were appropriate for an intercultural tournament. In varying degrees, all four events are selected and formatted to provide "open scores" that allow the performers to behave with the same sort of improvisation possible in jazz music.

Threeing, selected as one of the events, has a history beyond the period of experimentation in the early seventies. Threeing was premiered in a 1976, one-man show at the Kitchen Performance Space. Since then, I have done a number of workshops and presentations of Threeing at places such as Optic Nerve in San Francisco, The Art Institute in Chicago, the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, The Akerman Family Institute, The Milton Erickson Society, the Dalton School, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Description of the Tournament

Three judges familiar with performance and intercultural issues will be selected. The artist will walk these judges through the four events and explain the criteria for judging in a preliminary workshop. The criteria will include such things as reciprocity among all three, range of behaviors displayed, uniqueness of behavior displayed, respect for the choices of each person, and overall artistic composition.

Preparation: Established performing groups from each of the different cultures will train and rehearse separately for the tournament. One male and one female will then be selected from each group. These couples, wearing simple costumes characteristic of their culture, will meet with their selected counterparts for the first time at the tournament. With six performers, there are twenty different triadic combinations possible. Of these twenty, twelve are not eligible to compete because they do not include a representative from all three cultures. Of the remaining eight triads, two are ineligible because they are single gender triads, i.e., all male or all female. Making single gender triads eligible would run the risk of confusing gender competition with intercultural cooperation. That leaves six triads eligible to compete in the tournament. These six teams are both tricultural and mixed gender. If we use M and F to represent Male and Female, and use A, B, and C to represent the three cultures, then the six competing teams can be designated as follows.

1. AF BF CM
2. AM BM CF
3. BM CM AF
4. BF CF AM
5. AF CF BM
6. AM CM BF

This is the order in which the teams will compete. Each performer is a member of three different teams. All six teams will compete in every event.

Opening Ceremony: The three judges stand in a triangle in the middle of the performance space with their backs to each other. The couples enter simultaneously and stand side-by-side at the vertices of the triangle surrounding the judges. They bow to the judge facing them, bow to their cultural partner, bow to each of the other couples, bow again to their partner and then bow to the judges once more. The judges retreat to view the tournament. The performers then join their first team and prepare themselves for the competition.

- 1) Flying Blind challenges the ability of a team of three to maintain the communication necessary to balance interaction. The challenge is a matter of disrupting normal communication patterns with blindfolds. In Flying Blind, members of the team will put on and take off blindfolds as they interact on an open floor. The rule is that at least one member of the team must be blindfolded at all times. Each team is assured five minutes on the floor. After the first five minutes, any one of the three judges may signal the team to end their performance. If no judge signals an end to the performance, the performance will be limited to ten minutes. Total performance time, one hour.
- 2) In Hands and Sound, members of the triad will interact using only one of their own hands, while making sounds that accord with that hand's interaction. The camera will show only the hands interacting. Three positions from the geometric figure are used to position the hands. Each member of the triad will take one turn in the first position for two to three minutes. In the first position the performer

moves his/her hand paying attention only to what he/she feels. In the second position the performer touches the hand in the first position from behind and reacts without thinking. The third hand is placed behind both hands and mediates their interaction. Total performance time, fifty-four minutes.

3) Free Form is formatted in recognition that behaviors codified according to the geometric figure do not exhaust the possibilities of intercultural triadic behavior. Other patterns need be generated and monitored. In Free Form, members of the triad will play together on an open floor. The intent of the play is to invent new behavioral patterns. In Free Form, at the discretion of the artist, unannounced props such as a tangle of rope may suddenly be thrown onto the floor or rules announced such as "hold your hands behind your backs." Each team of three is assured at least six minutes of performance time. After six minutes, any one of the judges may signal the team to stop. If no judge signals stop, then the event will be limited to twelve minutes. If an extraordinary composition is taking place, the judges may agree to extend the time for another eight minutes to allow a full twenty minutes. Total performance time, one and a half hours.

4) In Threeing, the members of the triad will interact according to the formal relational practice called Threeing. (See above.) Fifteen minute time limit. Total performance time, one and a half hours.

Closing Ceremony: After the judges announce the winning team of three, video highlights from their performance are shown. The winners and losers then recombine themselves into new teams of three and perform Threeing until they decide to stop. This final enactment of triadic behavior serves to indicate that “the winning team” has won for all. Each judge then reunites one of the original cultural couples as a couple and walks them out of the space. Estimated time for total event, eight hours. Estimated time of performance, five and a half hours.

Strategy

In effect, this is a proposal for a pilot program. My ambition is to see tournaments devoted to an art of intercultural behavior institutionalized in as many intercultural settings as possible.

The Video Composition

The tournament will be produced by a remote crew with four cameras and slow motion replay equipment, adhering to the highest production standards possible. Actual spectators at the tournament will be able to see the event simultaneously on four monitors and see instant replays. A one hour edit of the Tricultural Tournament will be produced. Careful blocking of camerawork will be worked out beforehand to accommodate the events. Post-production will use computer graphics to present the geometric figure, A/B roll, slow motion, etc.

Tricultural Behavior and the Environment

Besides the value of developing an art of intercultural behavior, in and of itself, many useful spin-offs are possible. For example, Threeing is one of the five principal components of the Earthscore Notational System, which I have developed so videographers could generate a shared perception of the natural environment. New intercultural behaviors invented through The Tricultural Tournament would enhance the prospect of multicultural teams of people cooperating

to interpret and respond to our environmental crisis. People from different cultures can use modifications of triadic intercultural behavior to organize tasks of mutual concern, particularly tasks having to do with environmental interpretation and restoration.