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GAIA / GAEA (Guy-ah / Jee-ah)

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This is a “descriptive playscript” outlining the setting and performance activities for a ceremonial, ritual theatre piece in hopes others will recreate their own performances.

The outline is presented in two parts : Part I encompasses the performance context and the physical setting with theatrical suggestions ; Part II is a sequential, descriptive scenario of the piece.

The context of GAIA / GAEA was that of a university theatre production during Fall, 1986. Twelve performers (11 undergraduate students and a recent graduate now an ad hoc dance instructor) and myself collectively created a “ritual theatre piece.” Although twelve was a most propitious number for the work, we did not originally plan it that way ; the people involved came to the work through auditions. They were selected on the basis of availability — in two senses : the more mundane schedule availability ; and the more important “availability to free-flowing improvisation.”

The focus of the work was a generally open-ended investigation of “what Gaia means to us.” The title came about because of the commentaries of Kirkpatrick Sale and others on James Lovelock's “Gaia hypothesis,” and on the different spellings, pronunciations, and meanings of that term. It also came about because we liked the flow and feel of the sound.

“Rehearsals” were begun in September and “performances” were held in late November. Quotation marks are used with these terms because they do not really fit the usual meanings of either the preparation or the doing. The preparation consisted of four overlapping facets :

- (1) extensive and continual readings in a wide variety of materials on Gaia, including Native American, Earth Mother and Goddess materials, science, environmental, “feminist,” and sundry other facets of the subject ;
- (2) talk circles of sharing and responding to those readings and the feelings and thoughts regarding them ;
- (3) numerous and various activities emerging from the above.

And finally, a sequential setting down of the activities which seemed most fitting to the material and our responses to it. These sequences then continually underwent changes.

The resulting scenario outlined a “final” version which nonetheless included adaptations resulting from further discussion following a performance and viewing of videotapes. The scenario presented here is an attempt at a representative “descriptive script” to give as full a sense of the activity as possible.

For performance setting, we wanted to create a special, “power” place. Audience participants entered from the lobby at the side doors and down the steps through the usual amphitheatre-type seating area. Those seats, however, were masked off with black drapes, so there was only the width of the steps themselves, and one moved through a darkened “tunnel.”

At the foot of the steps was a little wider, semi-open “stage-set tunnel” of variegated materials : “beams” of varying sizes strung with a rag-tag mixture of (barely identifiable) burlap, foil, various fabrics and set-construction “rocks” The stairway and stage-level tunnels were at each side, and emergence from the stage-set tunnels (vomitoria, if you will) put one directly into the “playing space”, into what would become the sacred circle. Above that space, similar materials constituted a sort of “ceiling,” but one with many open spaces to the blackness above.

On the South arc of the circle (between the two voms), was a “Mound” area. In this area were constructed “rocks” in a variety of sizes, shapes, and textures ; there were poles of varying heights, thickness, and materials, including a couple which “disappeared” into the blackness above and behind.

At the other three directions were low, rock-like structures. Besides the opening in these structures at the vomitoria entrances, there were aisle openings at the northwest and northeast arcs ; these were the entrances to the seating sections. This configuration required the audience to move through the circle space in order to be seated. Seating itself totalled 144 in gradually-raised sections of four rows of 12 chairs each.

Prior to opening the “house,” the company did an extensive warmup in this playing space. Although the warmup included several traditional actor-preparation vocal and movement techniques, that time and activity as a whole became a very significant ritual of its own. The company itself helped develop the power place within which they would perform.

In the center of the circle, as the audience arrived, was a low but huge mound. It actually consisted of eleven of the performers covered with a stretch material called moleskin. The mound, however, was perfectly still and generally evoked the sense of a huge, rough boulder. It was important that the performers be in it in such a way that (1) they could remain still for a considerable time (usually from 10-15 minutes), and (2) that any protrusions were not identifiable as human bodies.

Just before opening the lobby doors for admittance of the audience, we began very softly, hauntingly in the background the music of Paul Horn playing flute inside the Great Pyramid. I won't attempt to describe the lighting except to mention in the scenario some of the moments of change. At this opening, the overall effect attempted with setting and lighting was one of “ancient,” unidentifiable. It seemed most to suggest something primordial, timeless or at “the beginning of time.” Costumes consisted of flesh-colored leotards with some lightly painted “distressed splotches,” over which each performer wore a short netting tunic ; both were tie-dyed in a mixture of “earth” colors (sand green).

Shortly after the first audience members entered the space and moved to their seats, the twelfth cast member emerged from being part of a rock in the South mound area. Some identified her as Gaia, or as Mother Earth ; we generally referred to her as Spider Woman since that emergence event came from our investigation regarding the Hopi emergence into the Fourth World. Significantly and deliberately, however, neither she nor anyone else was ever identified in words spoken or printed. As with the rehearsals / preparations themselves, I have referred to her as Spider Woman solely for the purposes of ease in this commentary and in the following scenario.

The few props used were preset : a bowl of white sand tucked into one of the “rock” structures in the South mound area ; a bowl of rice in another part of that same area. Each of these were designed and constructed so as to also look like rocks, with inverted bowls on top for cover. Leaning randomly against vomitoria tunnels and other portions of the setting were several rough-wood poles approximately eight feet in length, and a small wood tripod partially covered with fabric. A small bowl, this one made of foil and containing “fire sticks” (but not yet lighted), was in still another part of the mound area. At the West and East quadrants, respectively, were a Water bowl and Food bowl. These bowls were constructed to resemble ancient pots, but also had an inverted covering bowl. They were “embedded” in the quadrant “stone” structures.

The scenario

I. Sacralizing the space

After several audience members have entered and moved to their seating, Spider Woman slowly “emerges” within the South mound area ; she looks about at the new space, then seats herself briefly at the edge of the area and focuses attention on the mound in the center as the audience continues to come into and through the space to their seats. Soon she goes to another part of the mound area and retrieves a necklace from among the “rocks.” She then retrieves a

largish rock which, when a cover is removed, is actually a large bowl of white sand. She moves into the playing space and sets the bowl and herself at the due South edge and begins creating a “sand-glyph” at that spot on the perimeter of the circular playing space. This is a carefully rendered figure suggestive of a pictograph, petroglyph, or hieroglyph accomplished with a small “fistful” of sand allowed to slowly sift onto the floor as a narrow white line.

When the glyph is finished at the South, Spider Woman rises with the bowl, takes another fistful of sand and carefully “trails” a narrow connecting-line as she moves from the South to the West. She repeats the glyph creation at the West (repeats doing it, not the design itself ; each will be randomly but meaningfully created), and then at each of the remaining directions. She connects each with the “ribbon of sand” as she completes the circle and has returned to the first glyph at the South.

The mound in the center very gradually begins to move as Spider Woman encompasses the circle. These first “allowances” of movement are slight changes in position and breathing. They are barely perceptible, and only slowly, gradually will increase in number, size, and activity as the “sacred circle” is completed.

The audience is in and lobby doors closed by the time Spider Woman finishes the second or third glyph. Lighting will have begun a gradual change to even fuller focus solely onto playing space circle.

As the mound movement becomes more noticeable, the “Great Pyramid Flute” simultaneously segues into Waves. They remain behind the increasing movement of the mound, and are periodically joined by Whale callings. When Spider Woman finishes glyphs, she takes the Sand Bowl back to the South Mounds, “embeds” it and returns to a seated position at the edge of the perimeter. She simply watches the gradually quickening center mound.

II. Sacred place quickens. Creatures birthing

“Creatures” gradually emerge from within the huge center mound fabric (moleskin with tacked seams which can be forced open). This is sporadic and unhurried. All is still very much unidentifiable as human, because the people within the fabric are within still another fabric — sometimes alone, sometimes two-to-a-piece. One or two may have no additional covering (but they are late in emergence so “human skin” is not seen for a long while in the process). The creatures are as mobile as they find it possible to be within the confines of the fabric ; but in the process of that mobility they will gradually shed that fabric.

By the time this first emergence is fully established, the Waves will segue to Loon calls. After full establishment and variety of Loon calls, and somewhat dependent upon the developments within the sacred circle, Wolves will be occasionally added to the “concert.”

As the people within a second fabric shed that as well, they will emerge as whatever “creature” they may. There is a paradoxical “realism” here. Performers try to *not* be identifiable as realistic creatures ; but they work with being realistic in their own sense of having birthed into a new environment, of having had to struggle with that birthing, of being tired, perhaps cold, uncomfortable, alien, alone.

III. Innocence. Discovery. Trust. Growth

They allow investigative, discovery behavior to occur from within that context and only very gradually interact not only with the physical environment but with each other, finally allowing an evolutionary, slow transformation into an upright, human form. The creatures / humans grow, discover, and experiment. This will always be with a basic sense of trust, perhaps some trepidation but no real fear. The discovery occurs between creatures and then again between “humans,” almost as if starting anew. A very gradual change in lighting will have occurred during this entire birthing emergence and “place-change,” there will be finally a brightening which includes a particular “Sun” spot-of-light. People will discover that and realize its

specialness (but without knowing why) ; they will try to “reach” out to grasp it. As this happens, there will be a sneak-in segue to the Paul Winter CANYON.

Spider Woman will move among them and they will twirl about, almost as if she moved them. They begin to discover air / breath / breeze. This will lead to a “mirror interconnectedness” in which one small movement of someone will be reflected by another but with a different small movement ; this development will gradually become more and more prevalent and interdependent until the group reaches a basic similarity of movement which can result in a stillness of balanced positions for beginning Tai Chi movements.

IV. Tai Chi. In balance and at one with Gaia

As these positions begin to form, but *before* the Tai Chi is actually begun, CANYON fades out ; Partch CHIMES are struck and the group begins an abbreviated Tai Chi sequence together and comes to its balanced, silent stillness.

V. Chant-Seeding

The striking of the sarcophagus in the Great Pyramid is sounded, followed by Paul Horn's “tuning flute.” The group “picks up” the sound as they begin individually to chant ; some with “ohh,” some with “ahhh,” some with “mmmm.” They randomly move about the space, continuing to chant until gradually coming together in sound. They “summon” Spider Woman from among their midst ; she separates herself and moves to the South mound area and retrieves a bowl containing rice, then brings it to the Circle.

Another (male) moves toward her to receive the bowl while still another (female) circles opposite him. Others of the group move to prepare Center place for Fertility / Seeding Rite. Four get poles and place themselves at each of the four Directions, standing with poles held upright before them facing the Center ; others prepare the Center place for Rite by arranging the mound cloth and other fabric into a circle at Center. When they have completed that, they join the Polers, one to right of each at the four directions. The poles are lowered cross-wise, with each now held waist-high by a poler / planter pair, and all solemnly kneel.

Spider Woman presents the bowl to the man, takes off the bone, wood, and cord necklace she has worn since the beginning and places it over the woman's head. The man and woman do an encircling “dance” about the fabric on the floor and ultimately come together on the fabric. When they do, the woman lies on her back on the fabric, and the polers / planters reverse themselves and stand again with poles held upright, this time in raised position. The man stands at the head of the woman, holding high the bowl. He pours the rice onto the woman's abdomen / groin and she “contracts.” Her third contraction brings her to upright seated position and man has moved to kneel, sit beside her.

At that moment of rice striking the woman, the Seeding begins as the polers bring their poles down to a sharp contact with the floor. They and the planters begin a circling of the space with a rhythmic beat of the poles and the planters bending over to “place seeds” at spot where poles have struck the floor. This beat gradually becomes faster as it spirals inward toward the Center. Man and woman in center embrace and ultimately move into a position somewhat suggestive of a pieta. The “freeze” in that position.

After spiraling in toward center, polers / planters spiral back outward to perimeter ; they conclude with again holding poles horizontally and moving in to place them as a frame about the fertility site. They then Exit at the four aisles, and the man and woman are now “statues” in the Center.

VI. Altar to fertility rite and the fruits of seeding

A small tripod Altar is brought in and placed at Fertility Rite South Frame Pole ; a Fire Bowl (now lighted) is brought in and placed on the floor “within” the altar. The two people involved are then joined by another and they “explore” and “discover” fire.

Another person comes in from an aisle and gets Water Bowl from West quadrant ; people explore Water there.

Another comes in from an aisle and gets Food Bowl from East quadrant and people explore Food there.

Following the discovery, exploration of their own element, people will become aware of the other elements and people ; they will begin to share and investigate with each other. Some will also bring to the “statue-couple” who are then “brought to life” and ultimately join the others. The woman becomes aware of the necklace ; though not sure of why, its importance seems evident and she carefully places it upon the tripod altar.

VII. Selfishness, Destruction, Chaos

Discovery / Caring / Sharing with Fire, Water, Food very gradually becomes playful, childlike ; they discover games to play, ways to cooperate with things, ways to compete, and ways to tease. This gradually becomes more and more the latter, more “rowdy,” and finally more grabbing, more “mine,” and more fights.

Harry Partch music from “Bewitched” sneaks in and grows with this chaotic destructiveness, which becomes increasingly assaultive.

Sometime during this — after a LONG while — Spider Woman “separates” from it and crouches in Center. At some point during the growing chaos, she will retrieve the necklace from the tripod and begin “dance” movements — trying to get attention of others, trying to bring them to awareness. She gradually enlarges her movements to the entire space, circles individuals and couples / groups, tending to isolate them from each other.

Lights gradually fade, beginning to provide silhouettes.

As all becomes more and more frenetic and frantic, Spider Woman throws the necklace to the ground and disappears into background at Mound area.

Music Cuts. Lights hold momentarily with silhouettes, then Blackout ; company continues sounds as they “recover” from the chaotic exertion : whatever sounds that gasping, catching of breath, etc. happen to occur. As the sounds diminish and almost gone, LIGHTS FLASH BRIGHTLY (hold a beat), DIM (beat) AND OUT TO BLACK.

VIII. This living, flowing land...

In the dark, the first person speaks : “Listen.” After a moment, second person with “Listen.” LIGHTS begin a slow Rise and company continues with two more : “Listen,” and again, “Listen.”

They will all begin to recover, rising to their feet, dazed, puzzled, angry. Individuals continue the poem almost as a Round, so that lines echo.

“This Living				
	Flowing Land			
		Is All There Is.		
			It Flows Through	
				Us.”

It ends with All saying “Us” in unison.

At that moment Partch CHIMES are heard. Company turns and becomes fully aware of the debris and destruction, mess and what they’ve done and the Loss. They begin to clean up and create a makeshift “altar” pile with the “Fire” altar, fabric and other stuff. They place this a bit

off-center. This will be long, slow, and silent as they pick up every little bit of debris (pieces of food, etc.), mop up water and brush up rice with pieces of fabric. They “bring” it all to the “debris altar,” which is draped in fabric. Except for that “altar,” the space will be spotless.

IX. Reintegration

When finished, they join in a circle about the pile ; the necklace has been discovered, “almost recognized,” and now passed around the circle. It is then hung carefully on the altar. The group joins arms about the waist, begins a gentle swaying, and then moves into a simple Circle Dance begun with simultaneous right foot crossed over left and circling clockwise. Paul Winter CANYON music sneaks in. The dance will gradually enlarge to arms outstretched and including the entire space in circling, spiraling, interweaving and then into a bit of light “play” as the hand holding breaks off.

Someone and then someone more will individually break as they notice one of the original glyphs at the four directions. CANYON music fades out and all becomes silent as soon all gradually become aware of a glyph. People will be at various places about the circle perimeter, in surprise, puzzlement, awe and reverence at what they see. The following lines are divided among them, but spoken so as to be sentences.

1) Back.		2)Back		3)Back.		
	4)Going back?		5)There is no going back.			
1)There		2)Is		3)No		4)Going
	5)Back		6)Because		7)We	
8)Never		9)Left		10)We		
	11)Never		12)Left.			
CHIMES sound.						

X. Resacralization

Spider Woman retrieves Sand Bowl in Mounds and brings it to Center. She takes some sand and moves to a spot on Perimeter and begins to make another glyph. Gradually others realize they too can do that and begin to get sand and move to different places about perimeter — there will be three between each of the original four

When each has done so, he / she will gradually move to South Mounds, looking at others’ glyphs, joining others along the way and seating / kneeling, etc. randomly in Mound area.

They will look a while at the makeshift, somewhat scraggly “altar pile.” Finally, their attention will be drawn to the “sky” overhead. On an overhead piece of the “ceiling,” there is a rear-screen slide projection of Earth seen from space.

XI. No frames No boundaries — New way thinking, new view

Following a long pause, two individuals speak : “No Frames” (pause) “No Boundaries.”

Another long pause, and several individuals speak :

Gratitude		to		Mother		Earth
Gratitude			to			Plants
Gratitude			to			Air
Gratitude		to		Wild		Beings
Gratitude			to			Water
Gratitude		to		the		Sun
Gratitude			to			Sky
	to		the	Great		thoughts
	beyond	all	powers,	and		us —
	and	yet	is	within		

Grandfather Space.
The Mind is his Wife.
(Group in unison) : “In our minds so be it.”
Short pause.
(Individual) : So be it.
SOUND : Paul Winter CANYON sneaks in softly behind.

Company become part of the Mounds by lying on them, on each other, etc. They remain so until audience has left.