

# Trickster by Trade

## Thomas Riccio on Indigenous Theatre

*An interview by Dale E. Seeds*

The scene is one of great incongruity. A white man, wearing a plastic Roman helmet and sporting huge white foam hands, bounds into a group of black children in a squalid township in Natal, South Africa. He is a pied piper, leading them to an open space where a group of Zulu actors begins a performance that both recalls their cultural traditions and confronts their troubled present-day reality. Variations of this scene repeat in Zambia, and with the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert.

Previously, Thomas Riccio had traveled to Yakutsk in the Sakha Republic, formerly part of Soviet Siberia. There he encountered the Sakha Nation Theatre, a recently emancipated national theatre with few traditions of its own, only generations of Soviet-trained actors and Soviet-induced culture. He proposed the adaptation of a children's story about an old woman and five cows. The actors were skeptical.

The scene shifts, moving forward in time once again, this time retuning in Alaska, where Riccio sits quietly, listening to the age-old oral traditions of the Yup'ik and Inupiat peoples. Later, their stories will find their way into imaginative performances created by both native and non-native students at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks.

Riccio's career in theatre embarked along the traditional route, including the completion of a graduate degree from Boston University; employment at the Cleveland Play House as a dramaturg; a position as artistic director with Chicago's avant-garde Organic Theatre Company. And a teaching position at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. Here, however, the detour begins:

I entered into the bloodstream of American theatre, only to find I was an industry worker selling a consumer product. I was having the same feelings I had when I was a teenage window clerk for McDonald's. In my heart I knew theatre had to be more than subscription series, grant hustles, good reviews, and cocktail parties with corporate sponsors.

In 1988, Riccio was asked to work with Tuma Theatre, an Alaskan Native student group at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. Tuma, which means "the path" or "the way" in Yup'ik, did indeed become his path to the world of indigenous peoples' theatre, leading to residencies with such diverse groups as the Natal Performing Arts Council and the Kwasa group of South Africa the Sakha Nation Theatre of Siberia; Metamorphosis Theatre of St. Petersburg, Russia, a group of dedicated pre-Christian Slavic rituals; and Tükak' Theatre of Denmark, a Greenlandic Inuit group.

Like the trickster character of various indigenous traditions, Riccio's work with native peoples treads the dangerous line between mischief and benevolence. More specifically, it balances between white exploitation and native empowerment; between introducing a structure and allowing an indigenous structure to develop; between adopting the native voice and clearing the way for native voices to be heard. The performance texts of the groups he works with create a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy that could be viewed as a kind of heretical poetics, which challenges Western dramaturgical thought. It is a dangerous business crossing geographical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries.

As he explains in the following interview, which took place 28 February 1995 in his home outside of Fairbanks, Alaska, he is ever mindful of this discontinuity and tension.

SEEDS: Doesn't the type of work you do open you up to a variety of ethical criticisms? For example, how do you respond to the suggestion that you may be perpetuating a type of white colonialism; or, who pays for your services, and does that payment fit into the colonial/indigenous paradigm?

RICCIO: Sure there are those who raise questions of ethics and white colonialism. Those questions should be raised! But generally I find those who raise the issues are those who can afford to. Usually it is white American academics, far removed from the reality of practical application, who have recently positioned themselves on the moral high ground. The funny thing is, if those issues are ever raised in the context of a project I am involved in, it is me who raises them. A sensitivity to those issues is indelible to what I do, yes, but I can't let it paralyze me and lead the work. I am aware of the profound cultural and social trauma Western culture, my culture, has caused historically, but at the same time it comes down to "There is work to be done!" People and cultures are initiated and perpetuated an eco-collapse of the earth. I have to do something!

My interaction is ultimately, at its core, a human-to-human interaction, and the success of a project rises or falls on that. I give a project my full attention—emotional, physical, and mental effort. And that's exhausting, fulfilling, and rewarding. That is exactly what is lacking, what humanity is losing, what is being taken from us by technology, consumerism, materialism, urbanization. People sharing with other people. Very simple, and in that lies beauty and hope; Conversing, sharing, caring, and working together to create something. Sure, when I first start working with a group they are wondering, what the hell is this white guy doing here? There is a lot of skepticism and questioning eyes, which is good. I must prove myself by revealing that I am human like them, that I am willing to give my feelings and efforts to them. It doesn't matter if an exercise worked well or not, I am white or say the wrong things; what matters is being there. Joining them and them joining me—how do you explain that? But people know when it is real, when it is there. In the West and particularly the way we do theatre, we are task-organized—and that is how we communicate, we refer to things, events, ideas outside of self. The West is guided by time—that is its rhythm—which is external and artificial. With indigenous people, and the projects we do together the "task" is sharing what is inside with one another. That includes embracing their "time," their rhythm reality, which is a pathway to their relationship to their part of the earth, their history, their ancestors, and their eternal present, which is the wellspring of their performance. If the sharing is successful, then the performance is simply a natural outgrowth. It is a mystery to me how it all happens. I let my faith, my instinct, my spirits, whatever, lead me. It is wonderful and is what keeps me going and makes me a very happy and lucky guy.

You asked about money. If the University of Alaska didn't pay me a decent wage I doubt I could have done very much, I estimate I have spent \$15,000 to \$20,000 of my own money, so I guess I am my own foundation. However, I do receive payments for my projects. It is important they give something as a gesture of respect and value. But the amount has never been an issue and is always relative. In Sakha they paid me about \$150 (in 100-ruble notes) for about three months work, gave me an apartment, and gave me transportation to visits various festival and shamans. The big expense was air travel, which my university and I picked up. With the Zulu, the Natal Performing Arts Council [a state run theatre] hired me much like a freelance director, with air travel provided by the Alaska State Council on the Arts grants and my own funds. In Zambia, the project was the largest ever art event in the country's history. Funding came from Finland, Norway, the USIS [the United States Information Service], and the Zambian government. It employed, fed, and housed 20-some Zambians, in addition to producing a national tour of the show. Again, I was paid, but ultimately lost money. Some workshops, like what I have done in Sweden with the Greenlanders in Denmark, pay decently, but that much is pretty much sucked up by office expenses—long

distance telephone, mailing, equipment, and weird medicines I have to buy for travel. It is a good thing I am not in business, or I would be out of business. But I am rewarded in other ways. The universe provides.

SEEDS: Let's set the ethics issues aside for a minute. You often describe your work with indigenous peoples' theatre as being one of a resource, a catalyst, an observer, even a "pathfinder." How does this differ from the role that Western theatre practitioners have taken in the past in regard to their work with indigenous peoples? Does it reposition the white theatre artist in cross-cultural performance process?

RICCIO: I'm not that familiar with how other people work, or have worked. I don't know if many directors have worked with indigenous peoples. I do know being part of the dominant culture, which is reasserted by movies and TV, reinforces the Western method of producing theatre. Western dramaturgical notions such as cause-and-effect, linear progression, individual versus community, and psychological and sociological sensibilities are implicit in the widespread dispersion of TV and film. This affects the mental processes of indigenous peoples in the process of perceiving the self. I try to go the other way and ask them to look back within themselves to make this discovery. That's the predicament I think a lot of these people find themselves in. They know who they are, but to portray themselves they adopt a Western voice—a voice conditioned by another narrative model, or myth, or DNA. This removes them from the process of talking about themselves. I'm saying "talk to yourself, among yourselves, within your own groups, on your own terms. Define your cultural narrative model. Myth is central to what you are, what you value, how you see yourself, and how you exist in the world."

What I offer is a way or a guide to those terms, although I don't know what that is. I don't come in and say "I know;" I say, "we're going to do this and we're going to find a way to do it. We may not succeed totally, but we're going to take a strong step in that direction." I'm very much an activist—very strong-headed about achieving those goals. I don't care what it is, we have to find something that is truthful to them. Once I tuned them into that, the performance, becomes taken away from me. I go to organize, wanting to leave. In fact the greatest tribute to my work is to see it continue on their terms. In Durban, I went back to visit people I had worked with in 1992. Some of them had formed theatre groups, and the exercises, methods, and structures that they were using were based on what I had introduced to them, which were transformed into their own methods. That's my mission, my payback. That makes me deeply happy.

Now I feel obliged to write it down so we can have something they can refer to. Those groups that I don't have the opportunity to work with can have a resource that is an alternative to Western books on theatre. The image that really supports the need for this came from the lack of available materials on indigenous or native performance. Except for maybe a few plays, Tomson Highway's for example, that's it! Everything implies Western theatrical and dramaturgical structure—look in any bookstore. Another example: I saw this Zulu man, one whom I had been working with, who had a book under his arm. *How to Make Theatre*, an old dog-eared Western book. He wanted to do theatre, he was motivated, he got it out of the library, but it was Western theatre. There was no other model, nowhere else to go. In another occurrence, I was doing a workshop in a township and this man, who was a poet, a published poet, came to me and said, "Can I, in a performance, include poetry, music, and dance all together?" I said, "Yeah, why don't you think so?" "I don't know, I thought you couldn't do that," he replied. He actually thought he couldn't do it because he had never seen anything quite like it. He was asking me if it was OK. What he was really asking was if it was OK to essentially do Zulu performance, mixing praise singing with dance and music. There was no external resource that he could refer to or identify with. This is another part of the project that I'm now realizing has to be done: to offer this work as a resource.

SEEDS: What types of research do you do before you begin work with a new indigenous theatre group? Could you give some specific examples?

RICCIO: It depends on the group, but essentially I try to absorb as much as possible as far as written scholarship, oral history, and audio and video research. I try to learn as much about the culture's cosmology, as well as locate them in anthropological terms. I do that on one level, but just as significant are the stories—their major myths. It's very important that I understand their central stories, mythologies, and legends—who and what the figures and characters are within these mythologies. It's also very important to understand their music and rhythms. I try to understand all these in discrete terms: I don't try to make sense of it, I just try to absorb and visualize.

Then there are the visual arts—I try to look at patterns. With the Sakha for instance, I could see a pattern emerging from the design work in their jewelry and costuming, with hunter-gatherer fur combing with Turkish floral patterns. It's a very interesting interaction that told me a lot about who they were as a people and what journey they had gone through culturally, from a Turkish Eastern sensibility—which is where their language came from—meeting a north central Siberian hunter-gatherer culture, I stayed looking at those patterns as a revelation in terms that suggested movement—how and why they moved in their dances. I deliberately tried not to make something of the patterns, except to absorb, to be aware of them, to return them, so that when I'm on my feet with the group, I have this reference. I also use my actors as my research.

Essentially, my first two to three weeks with the groups is a research process. I'm basically researching what's in their bodies, their minds, and their culture at this moment. We're talking about anthropological research, historical research, musical research, design research and myths and legends research. The big research however, maybe 50 percent, is in their bodies, and the ways in which all of these elements intermix. This then gives me some idea as to how to direct the work. I'll see a variety of manifestations, then realize that, culturally, for this time and space, this one particular element is stronger than the others.

In the case of the Zulu, the strength of their militaristic tendencies is seen in their dances, derived from Chaka of course [the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Zulu warrior and leader]. I got this sense from ethnomusicological sources. Once I saw it being performed, however, I had a much better idea of the reason for their mind-set. This regimentation was expressed in an unwillingness to adjust the dance, and it became a psychological mind-set that we had to begin dealing with right away in order to create theatre.

This "Chaka mind-set" was a way for them to maintain themselves and their identity during apartheid. I felt this was no longer appropriate in dealing with new issues and realities, which were "soft issues," not militaristic ones. They had to reinvent, reimagine who they were.

SEEDS: Have you found the information available in the United States on these cultures to be somewhat limited?

RICCIO: Actually, in the U.S., the information is pretty good. In Africa, researching information on Africa is very difficult. A lot of times, what I find is that anthropologists and ethnographers have gone in and basically raided [for material], and the information never gets back to Africa, Siberia, or wherever. This information is presented from a very Western point of view, of course, so look at it in those terms. It's conditioned by its context.

SEEDS: If you started today on a new Tuma production, what sort of processes would you go through?

RICCIO: We start by identifying the stories or ideas. In the fall semester, we use the time to chitchat about what we want to do, and the scripts develop from this exploration. Sometimes we work on our feet, sometimes not. The people think about it and what they need to talk about, and bring it to the group, where collectively we discuss it. I try to serve as a guide; I have ideas too—what I'd like to work on, what I think is significant—which I throw into the hopper, and everyone works on that. Then, slowly, an outline starts evolving. If it's a story, like our last production of *Inua* (1995), which is really a collection of stories,

the literature was already in print. But all of the stories in the North are so spread out, that the stories are known by many of the peoples within their own cultures—differently told, but essentially the same story.

What we do during the research and discussion is to learn of the variations and discuss what they mean and how to perform them. Slowly the outline evolves, and basically we don't look at the story again. The story becomes a jumping off point. I call it "hallucinating the text." Basically, it's a group hallucination because the text exists among us and between us, it's something we see and feel, but does not exist [as a formalized text]. We don't refer to a permanent record; we adjust and discover things. If there's a moment where the outline we create says do this, and it doesn't work....; if it doesn't make sense to us, we adjust it. We take great liberties to evolve it to fit our needs. We make another discovery, or we say this will tie into something that will happen later. The atmosphere, the tone, [in the group] is created so that anyone can stop at anytime and chime in and give us something. That's the strength, the fact that everyone has a prerogative. Everyone, in a sense, is like a director. Everyone is actualized or realized as a creator. That's the tone we set.

SEEDS: Do the native students bring in stories that have been told to them?

RICCIO: Oh, always. All the time.

SEEDS: Is that considered on an equal basis with a source that has been documented.

RICCIO: It's the same—we look at them the same way. Let's say we're working on a fox dance, like in *Inua*. Matthew [Berlin] knew of a fox dance, but then Theresa [Theresa John, Tuma co-director and Alaska Native Studies faculty] knew of another type of fox dance, and I had seen yet another fox dance, so we shared and he [Matthew] came up with his own fox dance. We didn't tell him how to act it; it's just that this is what we had seen and done. We work together. If we don't know what to do, and we know we have to do a certain scene, we open the floor and the cast is required to think about it [laughter] and come up with something! If we can't then we continue to explore. What's interesting, too, is that when we create like this we actually forget the sequence. Someone will often jump the sequence or do something they shouldn't have done if they were following the script. We don't say "That's wrong"; we look at it as, that's how it should be because it wasn't connected and didn't make sense. If it made sense in the progression or sequence it was in, then that's what the person would have done. Since they didn't, it's actually telling us that maybe it should be done another way.

SEEDS: What kinds of things do you do to legitimize the "texts" of your performance? Do you consult elders to make certain it's true, authentic, or appropriate?

RICCIO: It depends on the story. Sometimes, if we're doing a certain song or dance, we'll ask permission. The Yup'ik are pretty liberal about it, but we'll call back to the village, where Theresa [John] or Melanie [Brown] or Wilma [Brown] heard the story, and ask them. They've never said no. There are also certain songs we use that are Athabaskan, so we'll ask Athabaskan people if we can use them. The Haida and Tlingit [of Southeast Alaska] seem to be stricter about it, and since we're so far north [of their traditional lands] we usually don't deal with those stories that much, and we're not that familiar with their traditions. The Inupiat, Yup'ik and Athabaskan peoples are pretty open, generous, and sharing.

SEEDS: You often speak of the indigenous actors as developing their roles through transformational processes, rather than the more cognitive approaches employed by Western actors. What kind of process do you employ to prepare the actor for his/her role?

RICCIO: First and foremost, it's a parallel line. On one level, we want them to become more comfortable with themselves—self-expressive. These are exercises that I would think any young actor would do. I've done that with a variety of cultures. This is especially important since many traditional cultures are very strict in the codes of behavior and how they access their own creativity, sense of identity, and gender. Sometimes this strictness is politically reinforced, such as with the Zulu, in terms of the way they perceive the self, and what their behavior can be. We address these issues on one level. On the second level, we explore their culture in such a way that they discover it's not something they blindly maintain verbatim, but something that's living and interactive—and they're a part of. We do that through a series of exercises, the most significant of which I find is the ritual preparation.

The ritual preparation is basically defining a warm-up based on traditional movements, orchestrated and created by the group, into a 20-30 minute activity. This includes the rhythms, the songs, the vocalizations, and the movements that are specific to that culture. So, rather than warming up with just a Western, technical, neutral set of physical exercise—a mechanics of the body sort of thing—we do the warm-up as a window or doorway to the culture. When we warm up that way, we are prepared to start creating by accessing the “cultural language.” It's like repeating the alphabet, and then using the alphabet to make words—new words—using the same language. That's the most significant approach—warming up the culture and imagination as well as the body.

The next step is to create within the group, the ability to jump their [cultural] context. I find that a lot of traditional cultures hang on to traditions as a way of preserving the self because historically they were so threatened and challenged. You must remember we're talking about small, fragile cultures. There are only 35 thousand Sakha, 75-90 thousand Alaskan natives. Compared to Western culture, wouldn't you be threatened and intimidated? What we need to do is to show that the culture is alive and growing. There is so much they have to offer; some of it ancient knowledge that is going to be lost. That knowledge needs to be a part of the emerging global dialog.

SEEDS: Is this more difficult with an actor who has been trained in Western methods?

RICCIO: Sure. Actually, with the Sakha, it was the most difficult. Some of them were Moscow- or Vladivostok-trained professional actors, in their fifties, even their seventies. They had received a very Western, a very Soviet-realism style of training. Even though they were native people, it was very difficult for them. They were torn, they wanted to learn about their culture, and now [with the breakup of the Soviet Union], they were allowed to express their native sense of self—but they were viewing themselves through a Western lens. This was an issue that I would mention throughout the rehearsal process—about how they were thinking and about how I perceived they were thinking. For instance, I would do an improv, the same one I would do with American native or non-native actors, which would be a prelude to free-play—a starting-off point. These people would do the prerequisites of the improv and then basically stop dead. They just stopped! They did everything I said they should do, and that was it. They had obeyed orders! That's how they were trained and educated. The same thing happened with the Zulu. It was like a kind of mental engineering for control and obedience.

Part of the process of creative performance was to reveal to them their way of thinking. In South Africa, this applied not only to the blacks, but also to the whites. How else could they endure such atrocities around them and justify it? They were trained to justify it, rationalize it—to accept, but not see. It's interesting how the imagination can be controlled, led, censored.

SEEDS: How do you determine the boundary that maintains the cultural integrity of the performance and at the same time addresses current social concerns of the culture? I'm thinking of your production of *Sardaana* (1993) in Yakutsk, Sakha Republic, *Emandulo* (1992) in Natal, South Africa, or with Tuma. How do you know when you've gone too far in politicizing the story?

RICCIO: The actors, if they're of the culture, will tell me. It isn't me making the decision; they tell me if it's gone too far. I'll suggest things, and if they react negatively, well then that's fine. I don't take it personally. It's basically a group dynamic consensus, which is the model that we maintain. Consensus is the organizational model—it's slower, and more complicated, but ultimately more satisfying. It's evolved from traditional Yup'ik and Inupiat ways.

SEEDS: Do they ever push it politically farther than you would have?

RICCIO: No. They make the discoveries. Once they get into the flow of it, they get confident, *then* they will push it. The big issue I find, when working with indigenous peoples, is their confidence level. They are less likely to be confident about what they're expressing or about themselves than maybe non-native people are. This is because I, we, are from the dominant culture, and whether we want it or not, we have this attitude that we know more, that we do it right, and that we are the caretakers of the general welfare. This seems to be implicit with who we are—our cultural psyche. I try to let them see their value, to provoke them to assume that level of confidence. Then they will push it.

When I read *Sardaana*, which is essentially a well-known children's story, the political metaphor was not apparent to the cast. When I first proposed *Sardaana*, they were skeptical. Then I suggested "How about *Sardaana* goes on the road, but the bear she meets is the Russian bear?" They all went "A-ha" and smiled! It hit a nerve. Then I knew the right direction to go. That one spice, that one idea, conditioned all our work. It opened up the vocabulary as to how we could mix and match. For them to do another *Sardaana* would not be very innovative. In fact the producer said, "I expected more from you" [laughter]. He actually told me this at a meeting, and here I was concerned with this very issue of going too far politically. He said, "I want you to do something that I don't understand. I go to these international festivals, I see things I don't understand and I want to do this at my theatre." He wanted me to be deliberately experimental, and to push his group because he felt the group was getting stagnant, but he didn't know what to do because he was on the inside. He empowered me to "rough things up." Then, as things started getting more unusual, I could see he was getting a bit concerned. It was like he was gulping for air. At one rehearsal I sensed that felt he had set me loose and shouldn't have. But at that point, the actors were already so excited that I had opened a chink in the wall, and they flowed through it, knocking it down.

SEEDS: Do these cross-cultural performances create a bridge for indigenous people to move back to more traditional performance practices? How does it help them gain a sense of their own culture?

RICCIO: Sure, but it's a bridge forward as well as back. I think for a lot of the peoples I work with, the traditional, rigid culture is looked at as useless, especially for a lot of the young people. It doesn't speak to them anymore. It talks to them of another world, the world of their elders. Because of that, it's dying, it's not living anymore. My objective is to identify, from traditional culture, a pattern—I call it the "DNA" of their cultural performance—and that is what we bring forward, using whatever is applicable from the traditional mentality, but then letting it intermix freely with their contemporary voices and images. What's important is that this shift is deeply rooted in the patterns of the culture itself, its worldview, and its cosmology. They have an important point of view that needs to be heard. We're bringing it forward, revitalized it. I assist them in reimagining their own culture and its own worth. I think, as an outsider, maybe that's something I can do, maybe with more potency than an insider can. Perhaps I can appreciate something that they, as insiders, can't see themselves. That's my advantage.

SEEDS: In many of the situations in which you have worked, there appears to have been a preexisting arts administrative organizing structure. How does this affect your work?

RICCIO: I have to deal with them too. For example, with the Natal Playhouse and the Sakha National Theatre, this was both good and bad. You have to adapt to what the organizational structure is and identify firmly how you operate, and be well organized yourself. So, in a way, I become a microcosmic producer within their context, working with them but also have a very specific way of organizing my own project. The projects I do are invariably organized differently from how they operate. The government-funded Natal Playhouse, for example, works in a very regional theatre sensibility, therefore I have to educate the administrators that we work differently, that creating a Zulu performance is not like doing *Winnie the Pooh*.

Likewise in Sakha. Tùkak' not so much because the structure that was already there was compatible. At the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, it was understood that we worked differently. This included our production schedules, how we work with designers, even how we come up with a script or a title for the piece.

Often, I don't know what I'm going to do till I get there, whether is in Zambia or the Kalahari. This still bothers administrators—they don't know how to schedule, to budget, or to sell it. I have to be able to indicate to them how best to do that.

In Zambia I had to create a structure because there was nothing within their Center for the Arts for us to work with. We created an ad hoc, one-time only project that has since taken seed. The ideas were presented then are being continued by others. Likewise with the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen; there was no organizing structure in place for the workshop—no space, no designers, no script, poor transportation, and few translators. On the first day, seven healers and their assistants agreed to work with me and I knew something special could happen!

I have to be a producer as well. The more specific I am, the better the administration can relate to me. It's like anything else—when they [an administration] see what you do, and that the project is clearly defined and under control, they tend to allow it to continue, even though they may not agree with what you're doing. This is especially true if you are willing to interact with the administration. If you allow for a “synapse” between you and the major organization, they respect you. If you come in wishy-washy and try to fit into their mold, their way of operating, you're not going to happy and you're not going to serve the project. For me the organizational structure is just as important as the artistic structure or the cultural context. The organizational structure reflects the culture as well—it evolves from the culture and conditions of the moment. It's organic.

SEEDS: In terms of contrast, what does indigenous performance offer the Western viewer?

RICCIO: What I try to do is to get people to be more available, as a totality, to a performance, rather than as a thinking viewer. I try to get them to be participants, not to the extent of being pulled onstage, but to be involved physically, emotionally, sensually, and spiritually. This may be the big difference—to extend the “hallucination” to include the audience. In contrast, the text in a Western show basically engages through the mind, then through the body. This, in a sense, is the total opposite of indigenous performance. Since we don't know the language, we have to abandon that method of deciphering the play, because it isn't offered. Once you slip into it, it's the wonderful world we lost, which is primary and innate in all of us. I think the Western world has forgotten this. It implies that we are a part of a vast undifferentiated whole, something that is always transforming, something that is mysterious and can only offer brief glimpses of understanding through indigenous performance explorations. I have come to know something deep inside that can never be expressed by words. Performance is a revisiting, a reaffirmation of this deep, and ephemeral, unknowable knowledge. It feels good and tells me that we are all indigenous to the earth.

SEEDS: This leads me to one final question. In your work, you mention your desire to see the creation of an indigenous peoples' theatre center. Ideally, how would you envision such a center functioning?

RICCIO: There aren't any existing structures or organizations for indigenous theatre that I know of. I think that would be an evolution of the work, one that has to come about because there is an increased level of interest in the work I do, and it's already getting bigger than me. What I need is to find others who are like-minded to help facilitate such a thing.

Rather than being a company, such a center might be a training ground or a clearinghouse for information. One idea would be to have a center where a group of people could work together on a project. This would be an international group: one could be Finnish, another Zulu, another could be myself, and the three of us could go somewhere, like India, to do a project. One could be a designer, one a director, one a musician, and we would spend four months there developing a project. It's a free-floating group of people. We gather in India, not anywhere else. We're citizens of the world, going to another part of our terrain. That's one option. Another option would be to have people come from various parts of the world to work on a project, maybe to work together on an investigation of our global similarities. Who know what would come of that? The idea is to reveal the methods and processes through experience, and for those people to go back to their own cultures, and adapt and adjust the processes to their specific needs. So these are models that may evolve.

Now it's gotten to the point that people are calling me and asking me for a videotape, which is fine, but I don't have a lot of time to be duplicating videotapes and information and mailing them out. I need other people to do things. It's important that if, for example, a Navajo guy wants to do theatre, he knows that there is a place where he can learn something he can take back to his people. That's what's needed, because there are alternative resources! We take resources from the earth, but we give back garbage. That's how we've come to think. A resource, for me, is something that is replenished, reaffirming, renewable, and reusable. Those that take also give back. It's cyclical—and the way we must come to look at the world. This is the type of theatre I aspire to. Theatre is an ancient technology, and yet it can play a vital role in the shaping of the future that will be demanded of us.

#### Note

According to Riccio, both the !Xuu and the Khwe accept the term "Bushmen" when referring to them collectively. The term is not seen as derogatory, and for them best describes their lifestyle, race, and culture as distinct from blacks, their historical adversaries.

*Dale E. Seeds is a Professor in the Department of Theatre at The College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. Originally trained as a designer, he received his PhD from Kent State University. His designs have been produced at Kent State University, The College of Wooster, The Abbey Theatre of Dublin, Ireland, and with the Ohio Light Opera. His recent work has focused on the performance traditions of indigenous peoples, particularly those of Native Alaskans. Currently, he is working on a variety of projects with Tuma Theatre of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks.*

