

## The Mirror and the Mask

This exercise was developed in collaboration with Aron Birtalan and Dafne Giannikopoulou during a laboratory period at the Stockholm University of the Arts. It was later fine-tuned and expanded during the second rehearsal phase of *Mythologies*, in collaboration with Erika Kooki Filia, Lena Klink, and Roi Becker. The script below is used during the performance itself – italicized text marks technical information for further activations.

### Introduction

Welcome, one and all.  
It's good to see you.

I would like to tell a story.  
I suggest you listen closely.

### A Story

*Abridged from The Mirror and the Mask by Jorge Luis Borges.*

Long ago, the armies clashed, and the enemy was felled. The monarch then called upon their poet and ordered them to write a poem, praising the victory.

After a full year, a time filled with plague and rebellion, the tribute was sung by the poet, who declaimed their verse with slow assurance.

At last, the monarch spoke: "This poem is another victory. You have given to each word its true meaning.

And yet, nothing has happened. In our veins the blood has beat no faster. No one has stood to meet the enemy attack. In one year, poet, we shall gather to applaud another poem. As a sign of our thanks, take this mirror, which is of silver."

"I understand and obey", said the poet.

The stars of the sky once more journeyed their bright course, and the poet returned with their scroll – shorter this time than before.

The verses were strange. They were not a description of the battle, they were the battle. Harshness vied with sweetness. The metaphors were arbitrary, or so they seemed. In the warlike chaos of the lines there stirred the God Who Is Three Yet One.

The monarch spoke in this way: "This poem surpasses all that has gone before, and obliterates it. It holds one in thrall, it thrills, it dazzles.

We are figures in a fable, you and I, and it is only right that we recall that in fables, the number three is first above all others. As a token of our thanks, take this mask, it is of gold."

"I understand and obey:" the poet said.

The anniversary returned. The palace sentinels noticed that this time the poet did not bring their scroll. Not without dismay did the monarch look upon the poet: they were greatly changed. Something, which was not simply time, had transformed their features.

"Have you not composed the ode? " asked the monarch.

"I have:" said the poet sadly.

"Can you recite it? "

"I dare not."

"I charge you with the courage that you need:" the monarch declared.

The poet spoke the poem. It was a single line.

The monarch and their poet, very pale, looked at each other.

"What sorcery has given you this? "

"At dawn, I awoke speaking words that at first I did not understand. Those words are the poem."

A sin had been committed. The monarch laid in the poet's right hand their third and final gift, a dagger.

Of the poet, we know that they killed themselves when they left the palace; of the monarch, that they roam the lands a beggar, and that they have never spoken the poem again.

## **Mechanism**

This story is a mystery.

We will decipher it, revealing the poet's blasphemous single line.

Our first clue is in the number three, as it repeats throughout the story.

Using this as the first step of the cipher,

we will journey to reveal the three strongest Symbols

which are occulted in the story.

The Symbols are at the roots of our reality.

They govern the domains of language, being, meaning, and value.

They take many forms.

We will acquire their Names.

Do you agree to participating in this process of divination?

Very well.

## **Round 1**

Soon, the first oracle will enter,

contemplating / mediating the story through movement.

You shall be their scribes.

After two minutes, you will be asked to speak out loud a single word – any word that related to the oracle through the story. This word can appear while seeing the oracle, or in a flash when called upon.

I will guide us through that process.

Are you prepared?

Now, the first oracle will enter.

*Three practitioners, one at a time, enter as oracles. The proposition of “oracle” can be taken rather freely. As a starting point, I suggest scanning the story for strong symbols and embodying them.*

*After each round, the oracle stays in the space, standing with closed eyes. The MC then calls out: “Scribes, please utter the first Name, one at a time.” They note down the words, and repeat them back to the oracle. The oracle then focuses on the words and repeats out loud the 1-3 which resound with their experience.*

Example (06.08.2024)

1. Lost, Amnesia, Ashes, **Unconfrontational**, **Desert**
2. **Innocence**, **Time** (X2), Chance, Slamming
3. Mirroring, Developing, **Dominance**, **Lies**, **Where**, Building

## Round 2

Thus far, we have revealed an initial set of Names:

*(the approximately 5-6 words which the oracle repeated out loud).*

These will now guide us to continue divining the three Symbols, and deciphering the poet’s single line.

This time, we will have three two oracle duets.

The oracles will focus on the Names we have discovered, and give them a body, saturate their presence.

After each duet, you, the scribes, are invited to call out one of the X Names.

*The duets are also about 2 minutes long and can be interdisciplinary.*

*When the scribes utter one of the initial set of Names, they illuminate relationships between the words, which can be freely marked on a piece of paper. The oracles can also reveal the word they started from, or the word which they felt most present.*

Example (06.08.2024)

Initial set: Unconfrontational, Desert, Innocence, Time, Dominance, Lies, Where

1. Unconfrontational-Innocence-Time.
2. Innocence-Dominance-Lies. Time-Where.
3. Innocence: Time, Where, Lies. Unconfrontational-Where.

Final three: INNOCENCE, TIME, LIES

## Finale

We have our three Names,  
those which bare the strongest relationship:

*(the three Names which were uttered most frequently).*

The oracles will all enter the space together.  
Using the Names we will alchemize the Symbols.  
We will fulfill the constellation of actions and intentions,  
that which speaks the poet's single line.

At the end of this dance, the scribes, and all of you,  
are invited to write down the poet's single line.  
As an aid, I propose the "soft ears" method,  
placing your hands on your ears,  
and listening for the line in the moment they are gone.

Let's begin.

*In the context of the Mythologies performance, the technique of The Signification Game is activated. Essentially, the practitioners attend to the accumulation of physical interpretations for each word; every proposition is etched in the space and elaborated on, rather than discarded. This allows each "Name" to stabilize in a certain body/behavior/action which is recognized by the other practitioners. Such common ground increases the density of each "Symbol", making them more "real".*

### Example (06.08.2024)

INNOCENCE became rapid and clumsy shifts of weight, at times along with an awkward sickling of the legs.  
TIME became long suspensions, clear lines, repetition, and abrupt collapses.  
LIES became subtle and singular gestures of the hands, often around the face, as well as a particular gaze towards the witnesses.

## Poet's Line

*The practitioners and scribes can choose to share their poet's line.*

### Example (06.08.2024)

It will never be beautiful; bend and squirm as you will.  
Piercing through you; tearing through me.

Shame is dead; body is dead.

This is us; there is nothing there/here.

Time is filled with lies and lusts innocence.

Innocence is a time of lies.

Lies are the innocence of time.

Time expanding, manipulating, presenting.

Lies progressing, widening, longing.

Innocence transforming, asking, remaining.

The fragmentation of the round makes it a bird.

Innocence is the downside of joy.

The bird dissolves in the water.