

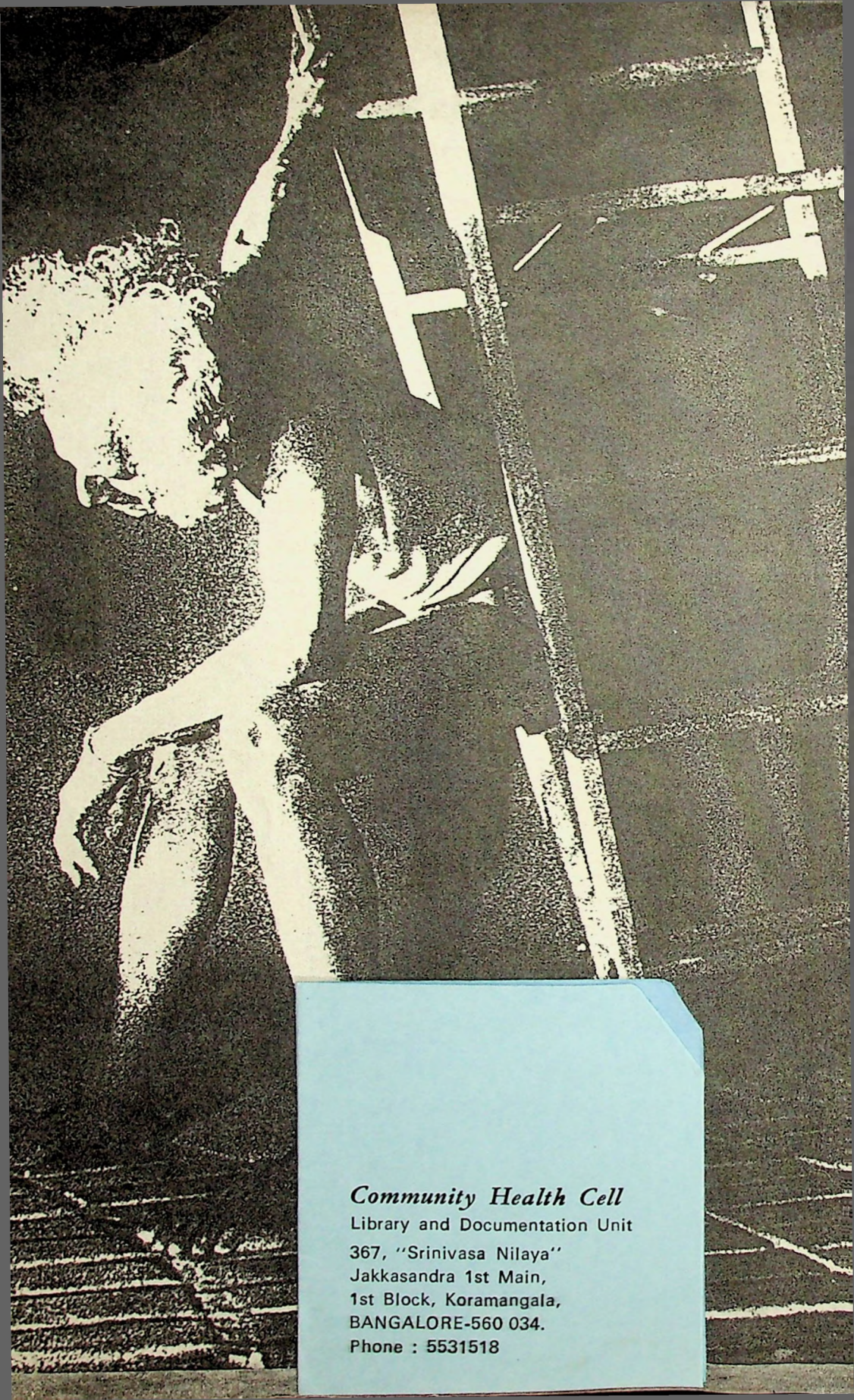


KHALID TYABJI

NOTES AND REPORT

ON SELF, THEATRE, TRUST,
AND ENSEMBLE: MAY 1997 - 98.





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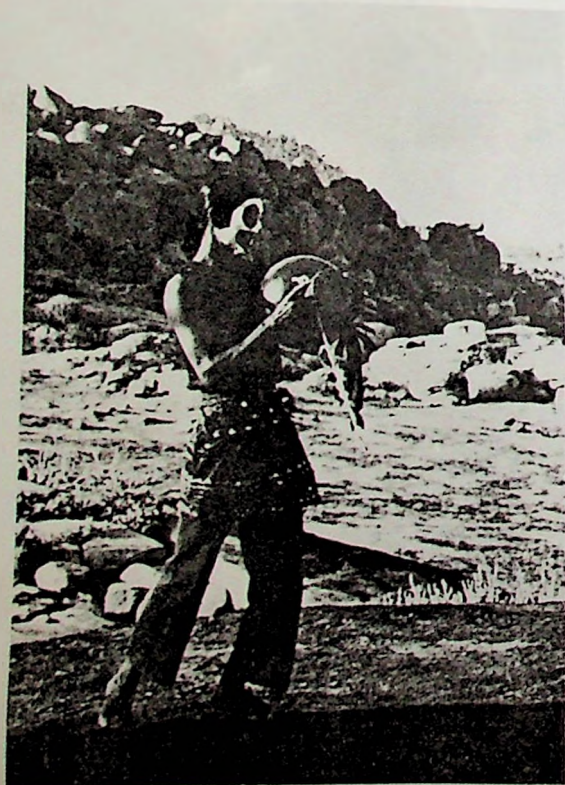
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RAMBLE OR PREAMBLE

• THEATRE •

• REFLECTION •

• VITALITY •

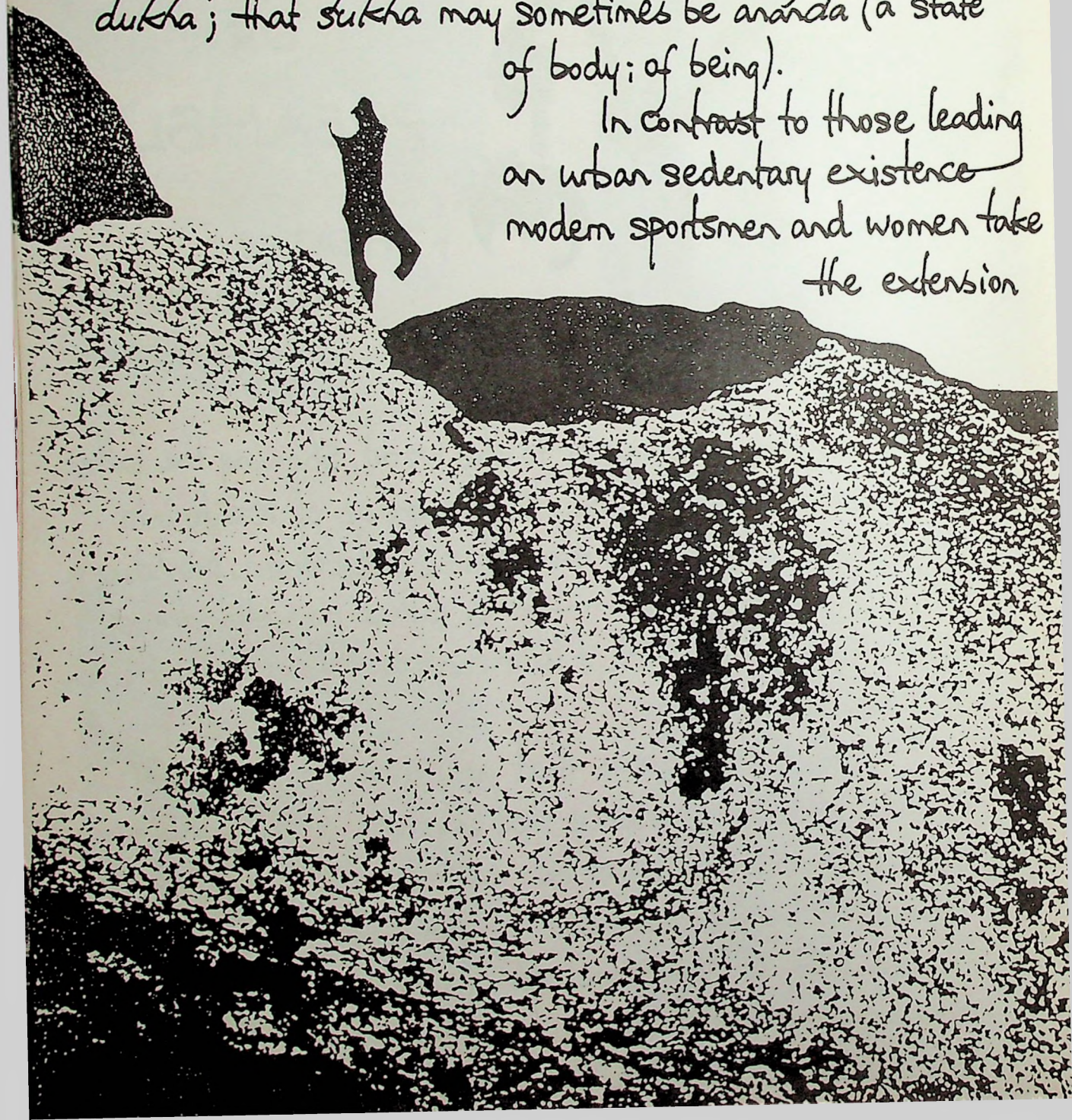
If the theatre is a mirror to the world, showing the latter its cracks and flaws, twisting the image of reality into possibility... dreaming the future; questioning, providing a vital life-experience — it is rather becoming the reflection of that which it is meant to reflect, reflect upon, and transform.

Part of the trouble is that any form of vital bodily experience that involves the human being in his or her entirety appears to be the antithesis of our aim in life. With a 'high standard' of living connoting minimal bodily activity and effort, it has become necessary to include such a

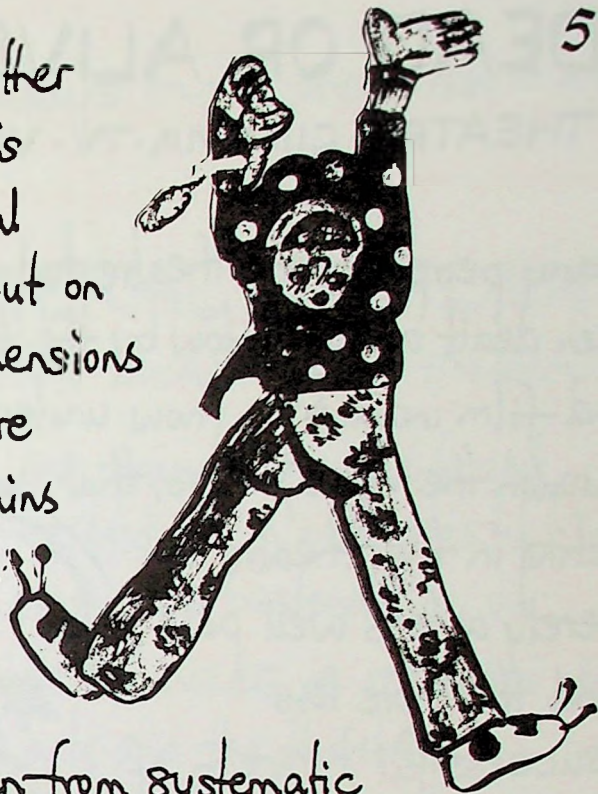


category (time — space) as 'exercise' in the daily schedule in order that our bodies even function properly! Despite the plethora of Mahabharatas, it is increasingly forgotten that 'this body is the field', the seat and source of sukha and dukha; that sukha may sometimes be ananda (a state of body; of being).

In contrast to those leading an urban sedentary existence modern sportsmen and women take the extension



of physical possibilities to the other extreme but unlike *hatha-yogis* and adepts of the earlier martial arts (for example), they miss out on the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of bodily experience. The latter are treated as belonging to other domains of professional or personal activity. Obviously intellectual and spiritual experiences may occur in sport but more as fallout than from systematic pursuit.



The theatre, involving a live exchange of energies between performers and spectators, has the possibility of being a site for such an experience of totality which combines the physical with the intellectual and spiritual being of man.

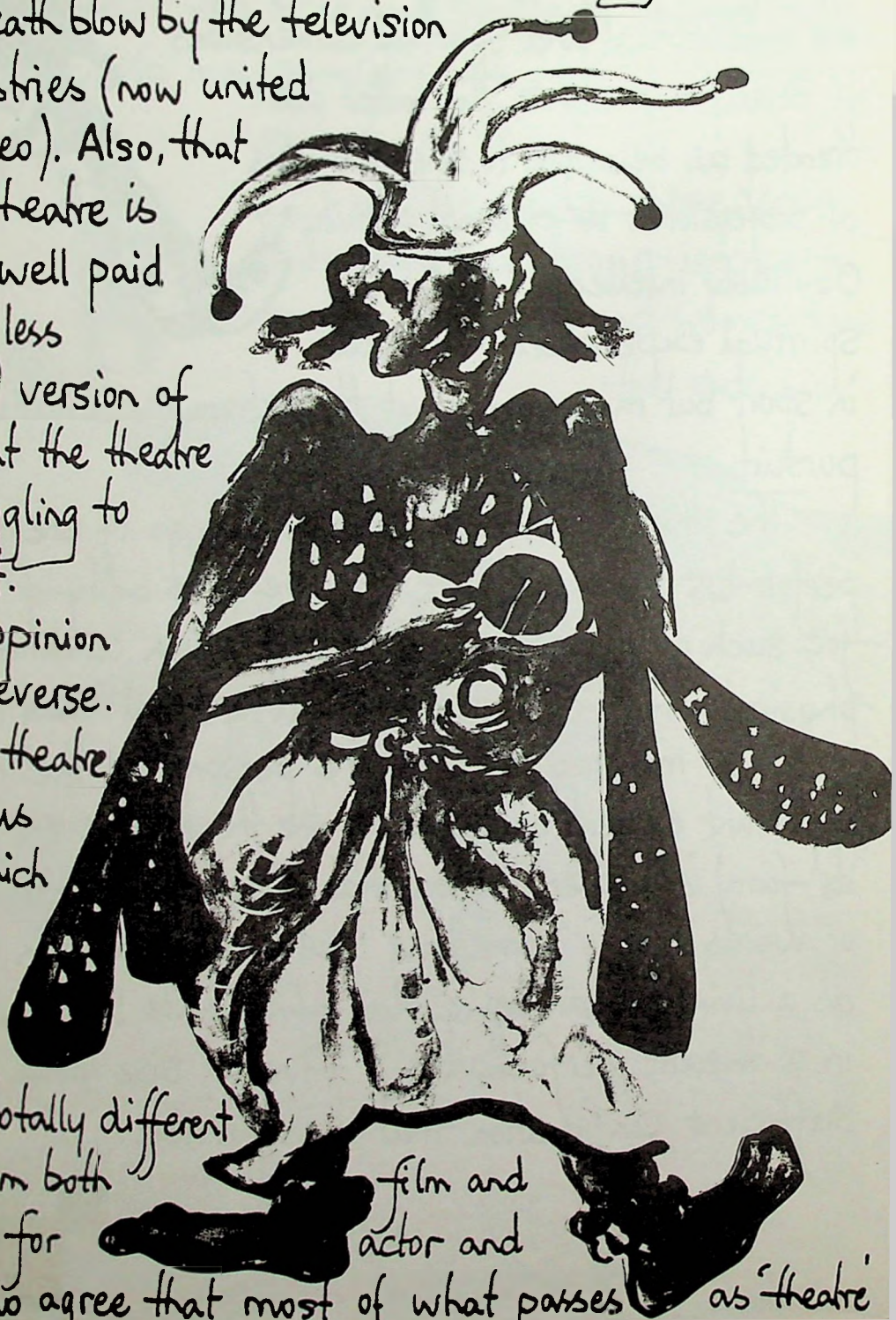
Let me say that for me personally the most important element or aspect of the theatrical event (whatever its form) is a phenomenon that is not connected with text or words but is something like a reaffirmation of oneself as a living human being. How often have I experienced this in a theatre performance? Five or six times perhaps, sufficient confirmation that it is possible.

6 DEAD OR ALIVE?

THEATRE • CINEMA • TV • VIDEO

Many people in the theatre today behave as though it has been dealt a death blow by the television and film industries (now united through the video). Also, that acting in the theatre is merely a less well paid (and therefore less 'successful') version of the latter. That the theatre is really struggling to remain afloat.

My own opinion is quite the reverse. It is that the theatre has tremendous possibilities which have scarcely been explored, and that it constitutes a totally different experience from both film and TV/video, both for actor and spectator. I do agree that most of what passes as 'theatre'





nowadays make one wish it were dead!

GENERAL COMPLAINT!

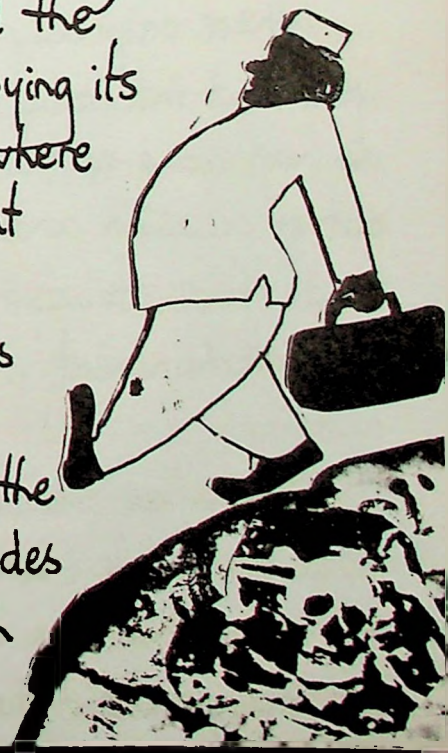
NATYA · SWADHARMA · SWARAJ

The ruling framework of life and living, centred not in ourselves but in the world-view bestowed by our erstwhile colonizers is reflected also in the arts and the theatre.

The idea of art or 'culture' as a category separate from the science and technology of how we should live in the world, separate from work, seriousness, and the practical, occupying its own enclave (where

tradition may even be honoured) is what might be called the general malaise.

Within this enclave (of 'art') there is either the direct import / reproduction of Western produce or, more dangerously, the vivisection of 'traditional forms' and modes of expression from the skein of life with which they were formerly interwoven;



8 from which they drew their meaning and inspiration.

What were once rituals of community life involving active performative elements are now staged as 'shows' because of their capacity to titillate alien (largely urban) spectators. Originally performed in a variety of spaces, they are now thrust into the one-sided picture-box proscenium format (which was already outdated with the advent



of film) even when performances are 'open-air'. The only alternative seems to be a Republic Day float!

Where originally intimately associated with season or time of year and integrally connected with other human activities such as harvesting or hunting, birth or marriage, they are now taken out of occasion and fitted into the schedule of 'theatre festivals', trade fairs, tourism melas, and diplomatic summits — again as 'entertainment', outside the orbit of the central, serious activity.

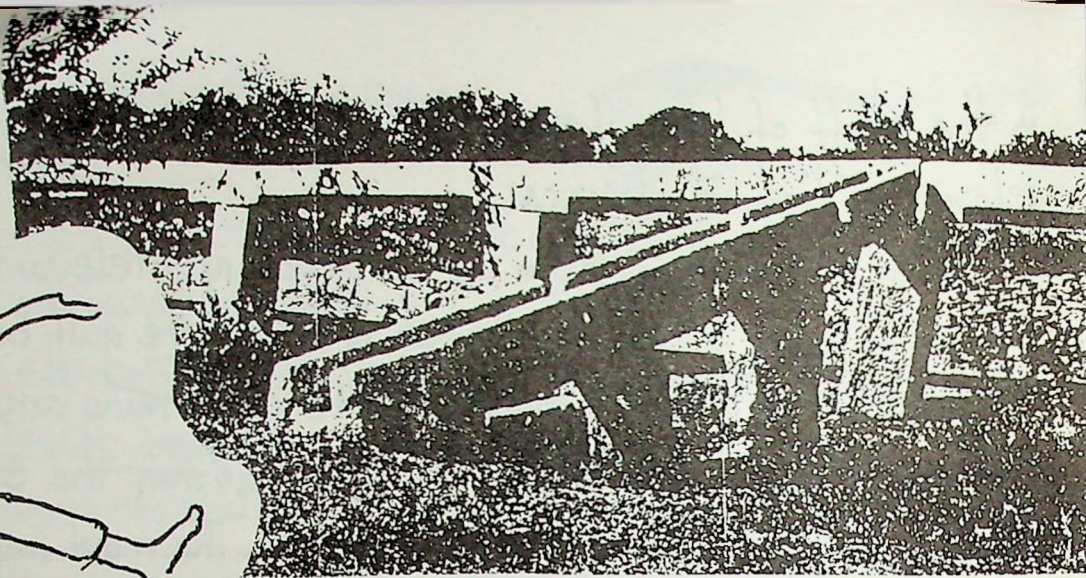
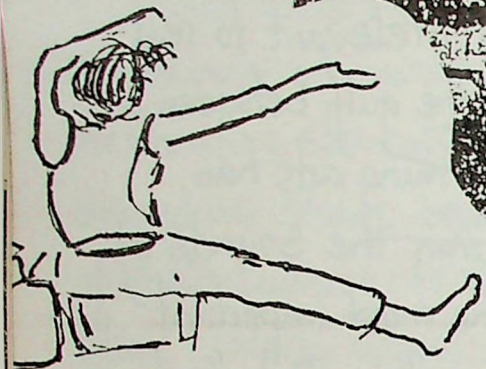
So-called 'serious theatre' is also fitted into that titillating addenda to life known as entertainment. It conforms to and reaffirms the notion that the utilitarian and the symbolic (aesthetic) are two independent domains with little practical connection. The one

is the stuff of life whereas the other is what provides relaxation from its stresses.

To be an 'artist' is to be on the periphery; irrelevant to real living. In recent years the attempt to bridge the gulf between the traditional and the modern in the performing arts has been confined to the realm of *f o r m* within the bounds of this modern European frame of reference. The most important aspect of 'traditional art' (is there such a thing?), that it exists in intimate relation with the other domains of life, is not a consideration at all.

All this does not mean that there are no hopeful developments. There are, but far too few for such a rolling landscape.





THE TRADITIONS AND US

SELF, WORLD, AND THE OTHER IN
PERFORMANCE, DAILY LIFE, THE HERE, NOW

What can we learn from the traditions? Many things.
Whatever interests us.

Most especially that the performer, as chief
instrument in the theatre, must engage
in daily

r i y a z

(sadhana, training,
practice) throughout life, and not
just once in drama course or school.
Performance has the possibility of
constant and unending self-development.



Secondly, that the theatre, which has partly grown out of "the ashes of 'ritual', has the possibility of connecting with the world outside the 'performance' / 'stage' (i.e. the rest of life) and that it can be a rite of passage from one living state to another (not just from a state of tedium to one of utter boredom!).

That the performer is a vehicle of the work which, since it occurs in public space, for the 'public', is a form of 'public service'. Theatre is a service station for the experience of the life of the human spirit.

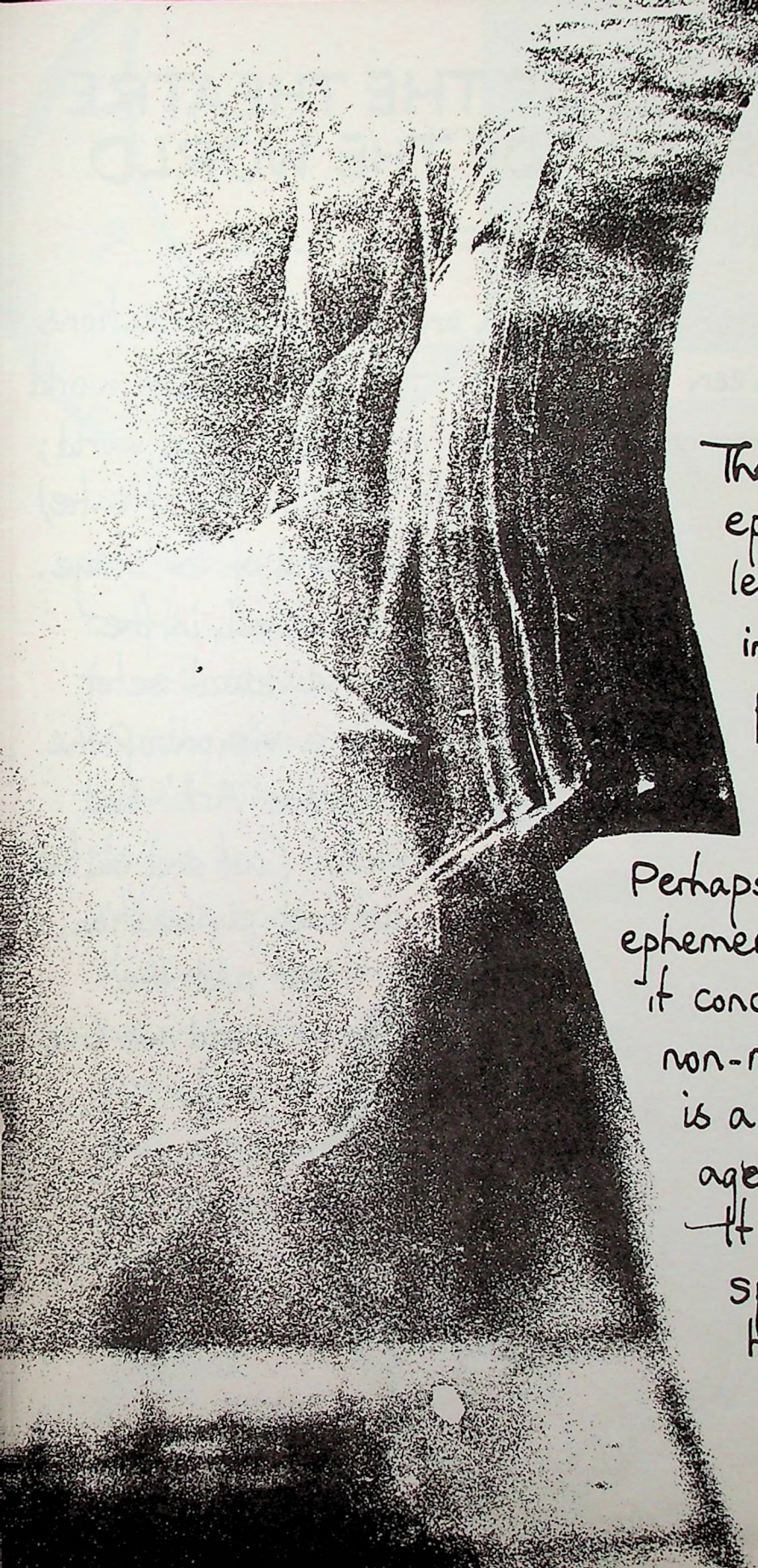


That the theatre can be a place of 'extra-daily' - natya-dharmi reality and not merely a replication of the world outside. The theatre



is a place where performers may occupy different bodies and where both performers and spectators may experience different dimensions of reality.





TRACES IN THE AIR

Theatre is an
ephemeral art
leaving only a trace
in those individuals
present together on
a particular
occasion.

Perhaps the very fact of its
ephemerality, the fact that
it concerns itself with
non-material produce,
is a sign to us in this
age of the material God.
It is a gift of the
spirit and the spirit
has defied definition
throughout
history.

THE WORLD OF THE THEATRE & THE THEATRE OF THE WORLD

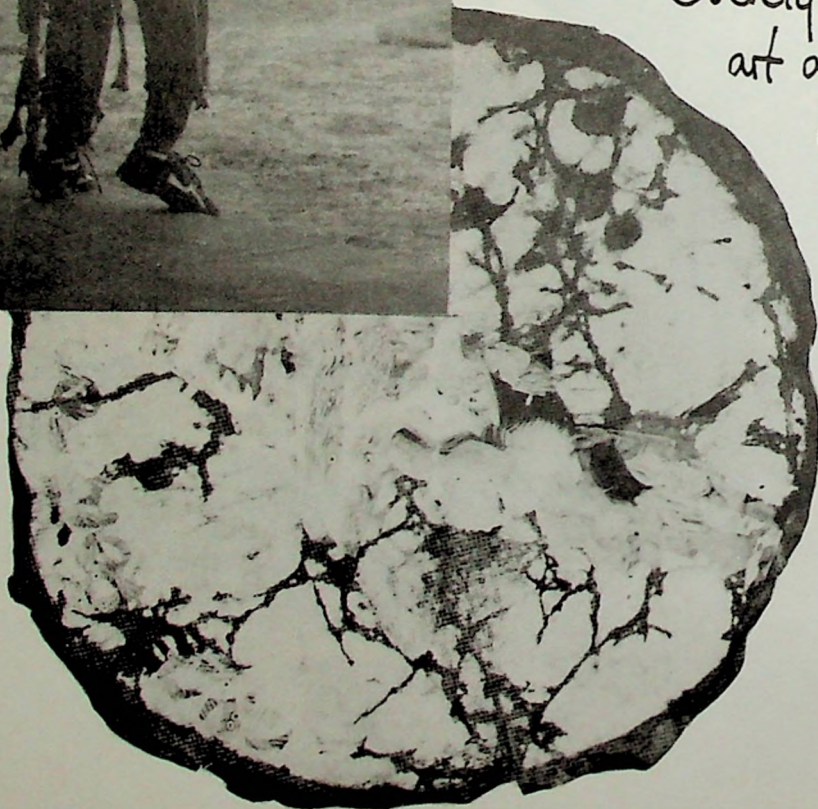
ACTS ON STAGE • ACTS IN LIFE

I consider it important to reopen and examine questions of the relation between ourselves on the stage of the world

(i.e. in 'life'; the 'real' world; the world outside the theatre) and in the world of the stage.

At a personal level, in the life of each individual actor, and also with a vision of the relation between 'Art' and

'Society' (art and culture, art and civilization, art and the world we live in).





In the theatre as in
anything else we
have to respond to a
rapidly changing life-
world. One has to
define one's role and
modus operandi;
discover whether
we indeed have
something to offer
that is important
for people, for
ourselves.



NOTES ON MYSELF ~

SELF IN WORLD ·

WORLD IN SELF

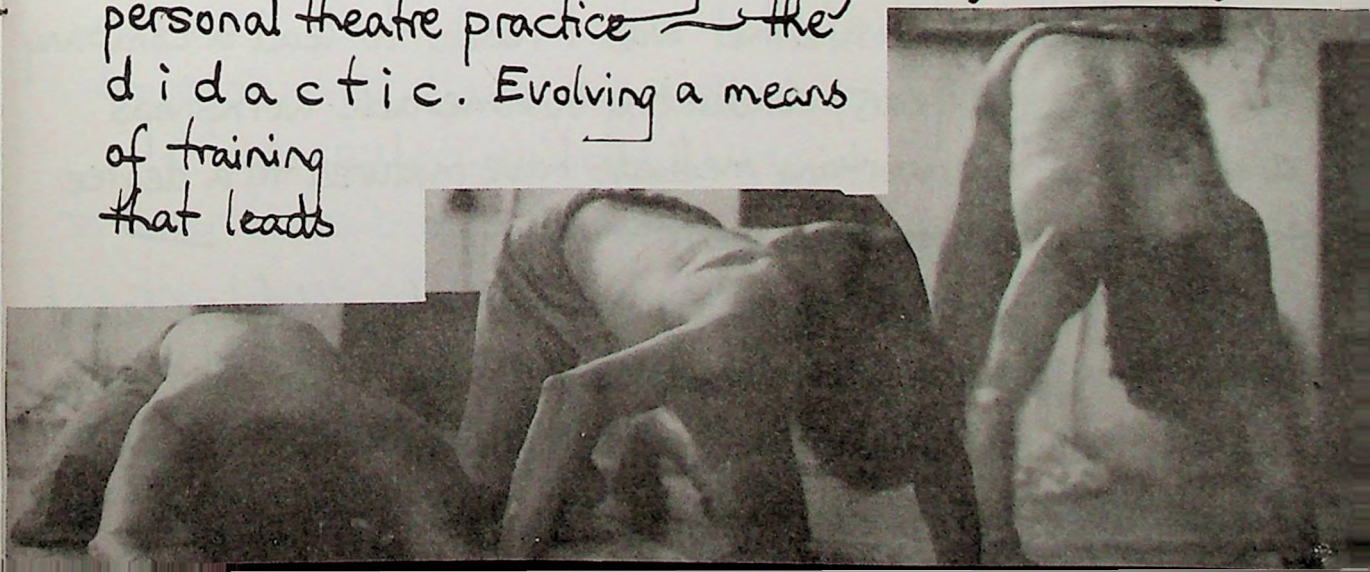
I would like to describe my professional performing life as comprising several streams that coalesce to form the river on which I attempt to steer my boat. Each stream consists of a type of theatrical activity or an attempt to bridge two or more domains of life and/or work. I do not follow a practice of staging one production after another. Each of my performances has evolved (and continues to evolve) over a period of time in response to a particular problem, situation, or desire. Each remains an ongoing site of research.

My initiation into the theat began most unexpectedly, almost



by accident, certainly without premonition, in 1974. I served a wonderful apprenticeship under Barry John with Theatre Action Group in Delhi. Working with the group as actor, production assistant, and eventually Administrative Director was a complete theatre education not only in all aspects of theatre production but in a vast variety of styles and subjects with Barry's meticulous thoroughness running as a thread through it all. My primary interest remained, however, with what had ensnared me in the first place — a form of ensemble work with the psychic and physical being of the actor as its central focus. Wanting to explore this direction further and weary of repeatedly mounting half-finished productions of great possibility, I left TAG and began a phase of workshops with a number of successive groups and institutions.

This constituted the beginning of the first stream of my personal theatre practice — the didactic. Evolving a means of training that leads





the actor into an endless realm of possibility by unshackling the human instrument.

I began to lead workshops because I wanted to participate in a form of work that nobody seemed to be doing. I found that most people inclined towards the theatre could not function

without the carrot of performance being defined and scheduled in advance. I, on the other hand, was trying to break away from that system.

Moving away from 'actors' I worked with people who were not interested in performance but in a type of phenomenon that occurred between people in the theatre workspace — an encounter on a basis different from the conventions of everyday life (including language). I hoped to find a group of people who would stay over a long period. No one did. Neither was I ready to lead a company.

Over the years, conducting innumerable workshops and courses, my working methods have matured to a degree that has made this possible.

As teacher and conductor of workshops I have learnt a lot from playwright, actor, director Badal Sircar who, along with his group Satabdi, has been friend, stimulus, and inspiration over two decades.

The powerful, magical quality brought to the workspace by Zbigniew Cynkutis (at the DSW in Poland shortly before his tragic death in 1987) will always remain a vivid impression.

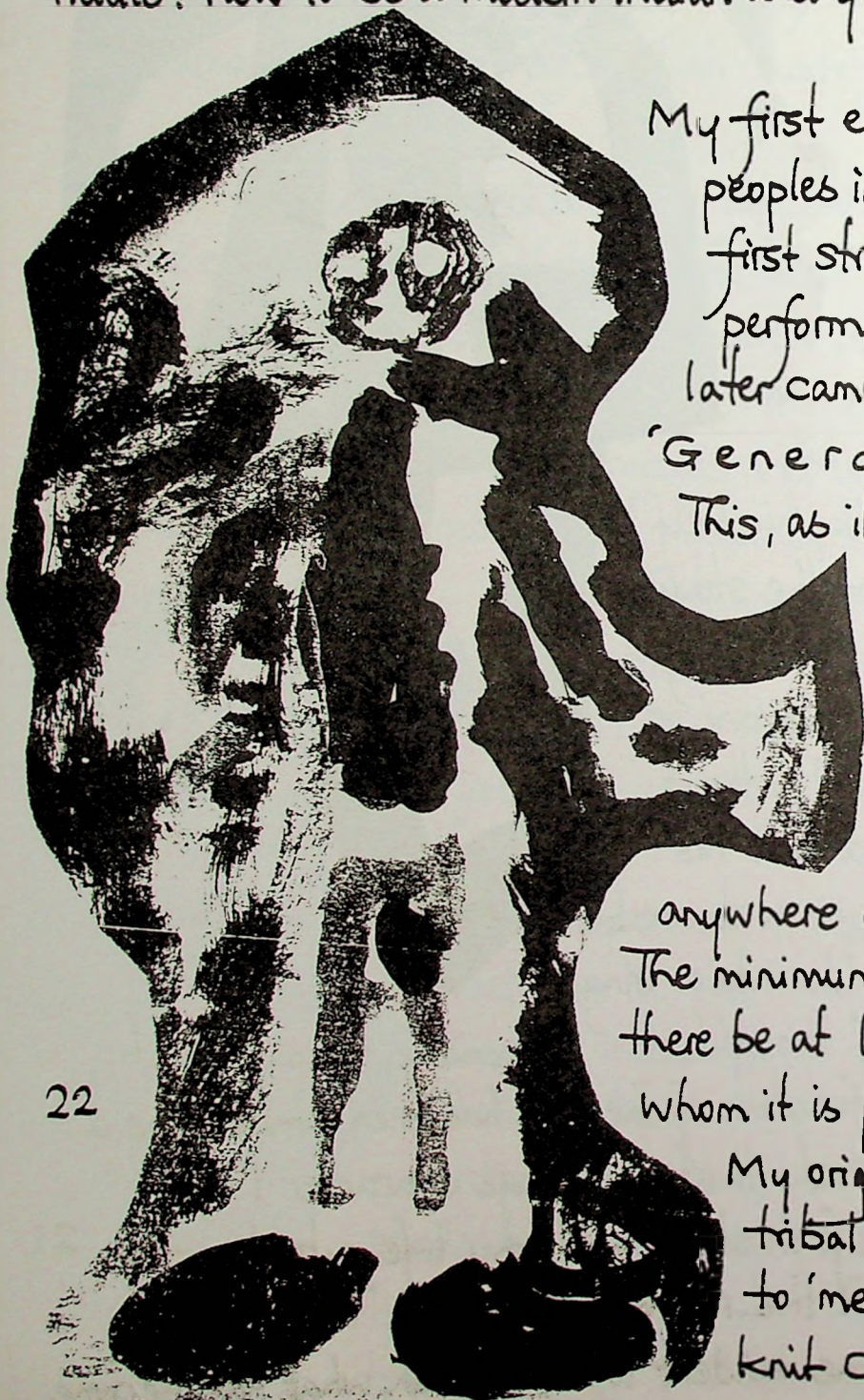
Jola



Cynkutis has taught me a great deal. A brief spell with the Gardzienice Theatre Association in Poland beautifully demonstrated some of the possibilities embodied in this type of human encounter. Barry John threw me into my first session as leader and encouraged me to continue.

Most educative in the course of my evolution as a teacher have been a 3 month workshop with three people on the lawns of Delhi University (1979); a 7 month stint leading training with the National School of Drama Repertory Company in Delhi (1983); teaching at the National School of

a continuing dialogue with Badal da in Calcutta, through the challenge posed by tribal people, by the Bauls, by the Natyashastra, by Grotowski... Over the years I have also been trying to answer (in life) Prof. J.P.S. Uberoi's challenging riddle: how to be a modern Indian and yet remain oneself.

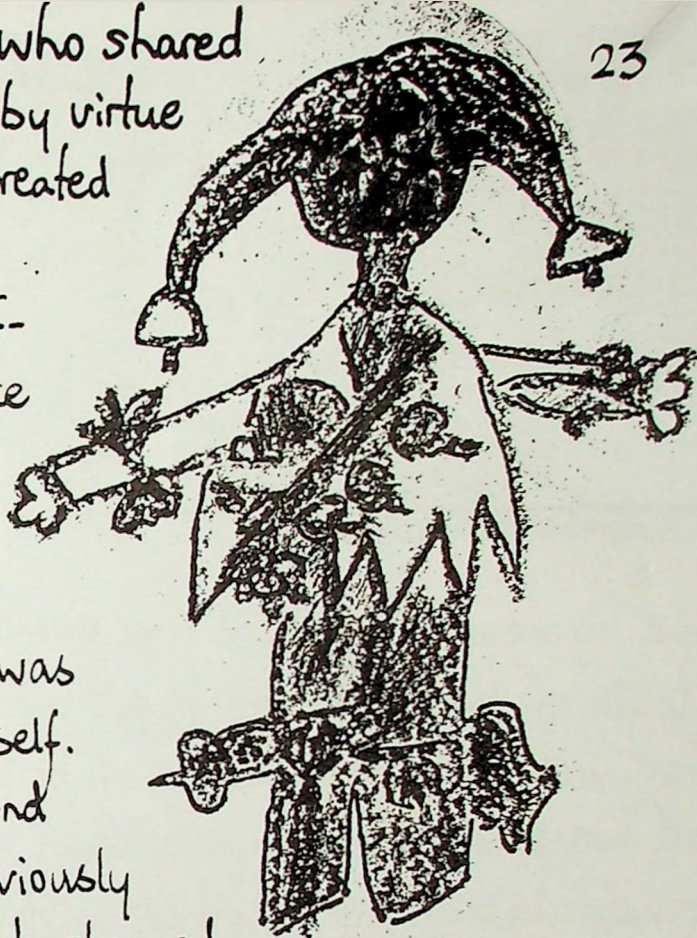


My first encounters with tribal peoples in 1978 led to the first stream of personal performative activity which later came to be called 'General Tomfoolery'. This, as its name suggests, is more a mode of performance than a 'performance' per se. As such, it is possible anywhere and at any time.

The minimum condition is that there be at least one 'other' with whom it is possible to interACT.

My original intention, in tribal Orissa, was primarily to 'meet' with the closely knit communities amongst

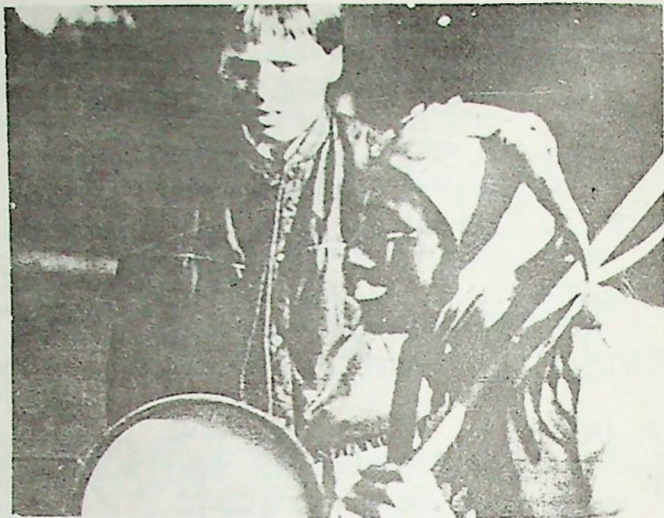
whom I was an outsider who shared no common language and, by virtue of being a stranger, was treated with a certain degree of suspicion. I sought a self-evident theatrical presence in order to 'explain' who I was and communicate the friendly nature of my visit; to give a gift that was non-material but of oneself.



The result went far beyond anything I could have previously imagined and considerably changed my idea of the possibilities of theatre. I found an openness to laughter, an immediate recognition of play, willing participation, and even a continuation of the 'performance' from where I left off.

Many years after these 'first encounters' I extended the arena of this type of activity to include u r b a n and other r u r a l environments in Europe and in India. Attempting to describe it some years ago I wrote:

'General Tomfoolery involves playing with people as opposed to playing before them. It seeks to elicit from people an attitude of playfulness, laughter,



good humour. Situations and events follow one another by a logic of their own — in a spirit of improvisation — often involving a transgression of boundaries between the fool and his public, the boundaries of public space, and also boundaries between members of the public. The aim is not subversion for its own sake but what may be described as a theatrical meeting, an open event, an opening. Theatre is by definition a transgression of the everyday. Here it is not confined to a special place: a stage. Wherever the Fool goes he transforms the environment into a theatrical arena by virtue of his costumed presence.'



In this way General Tomfoolery bridges the divide between the stage and the world, by injecting the theatrical into

everyday space.

General Tomfoolery has itself been mother to several other performance streams. First among these is a theatrical event entitled Foolshow, involving the participation of the public in a series of increasingly elaborate pranks that dissolve the distinction between children and adults. This is an attempt to elicit active participation from a would-be passive 'spectator', involving him or her in the process of the creative act, the act of play. This type of activity usually takes place





in open public environments (town square, street, park, village centre...) where only those willing and wishing to be there need remain; where no-one is forced into an undesired act. As in General Tomfoolery, I use no conventional verbal language but sometimes, in literate urban cultures, I take recourse to written and painted signs (in the local language of course!). Most of my communication is through gesture, sound, and a versatile whistle. On one occasion, in Poland, I used this performance as platform to make a comment (through actions and signs) on the racism of which I was a butt. I received a very warm applause in solidarity. Otherwise no 'messages' so far.

26 Both General Tomfoolery and Foolshow have combined to

form a third stream of theatrical activity, in 'special institutions' for the mentally and / or physically handicapped, old people in 'homes', prisoners, alcoholics, and the like. There is no change of rule or attitude here: only the same seeking of an interesting, enjoyable, and active 'meeting' in whatever circumstance and with whoever it may take place. Such meetings may be one-off events or a series. There has often been a powerful exchange and release of energies, relaxation, much laughter... 'Patients' feel at ease as they see someone madder and more peculiar than any of them! People on the street relax and lower their defences for the same reason. They find solidarity with strangers in relation to this passing 'mental'.

General Tomfoolery (in being an open system of improvisation in relation to the social and physical environment) has also provided the means for meeting and interacting with other performers of different types. I have performed in

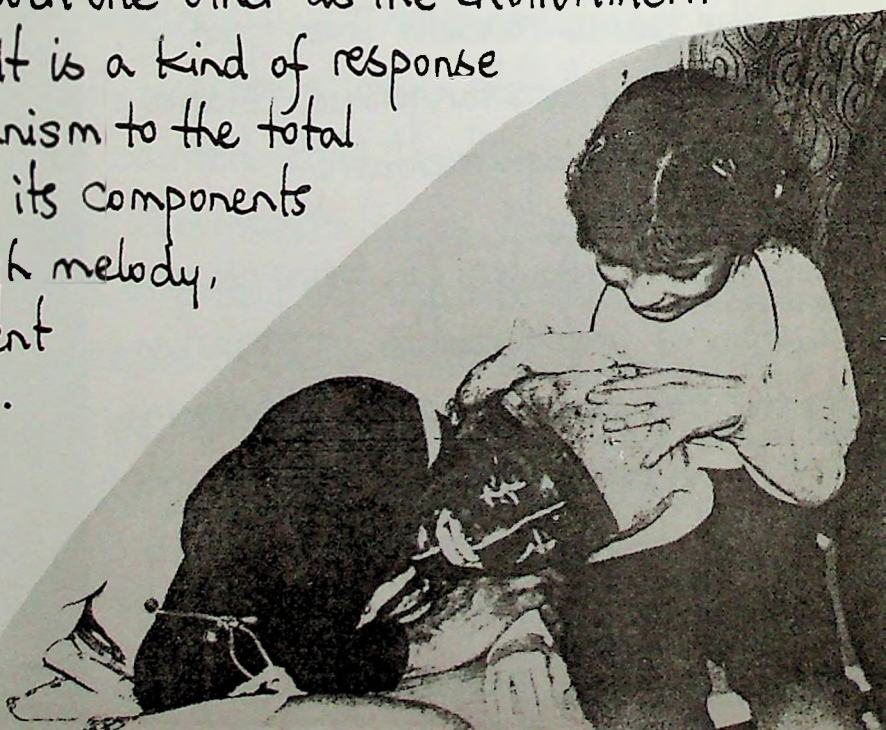


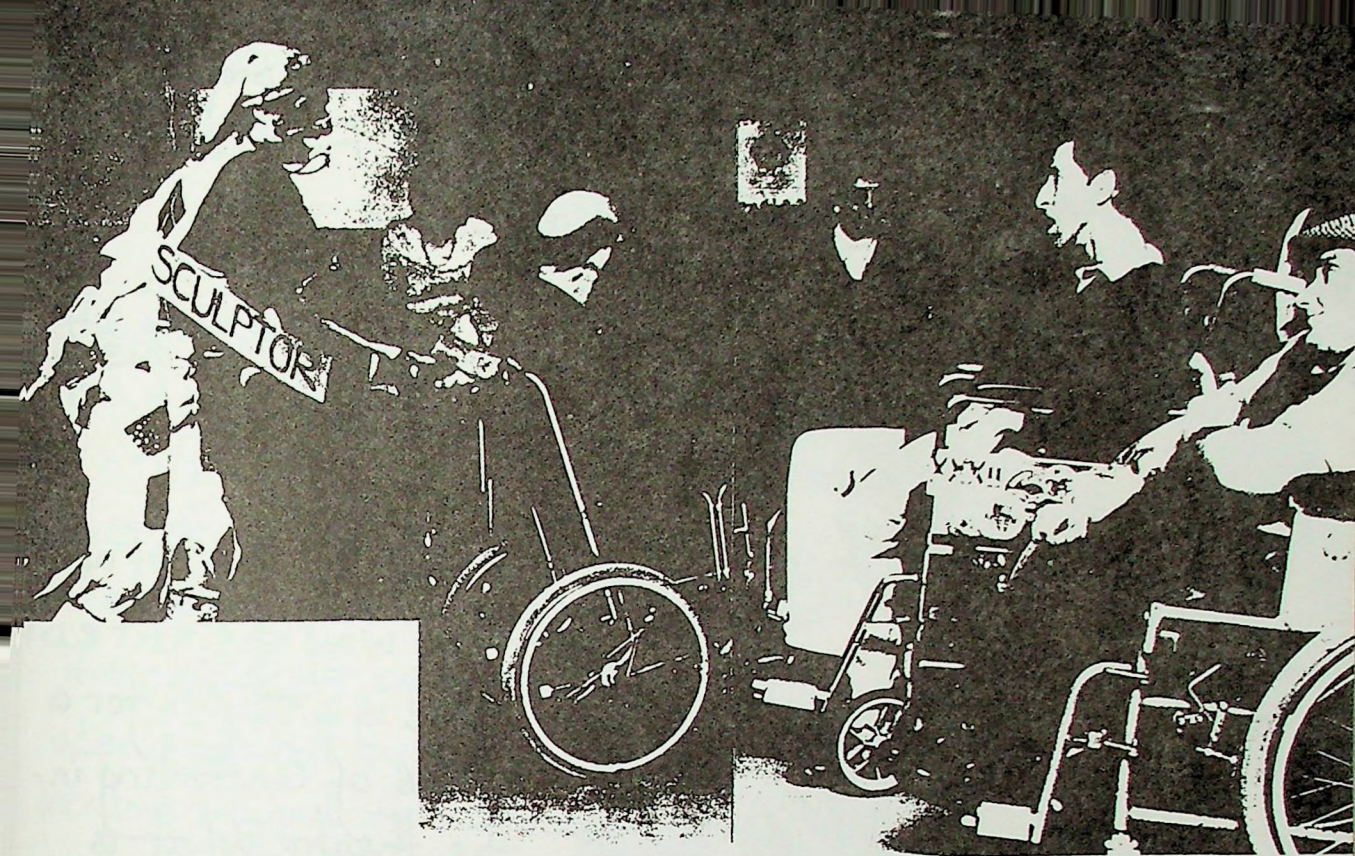


conjunction with a Swedish clown, danced with Chhatis-garti performers and Bauls from Bengal, interacted with street acrobats in Delhi and Gypsies in the Polish

Tatra... and of course played all kinds of pranks with the tribal peoples of Central India.

Another stream that has sprung out of the rich wellsprings of General Tomfoolery is a way of moving through space with song and dance which I call Dance of the Mirror. Unlike its predecessor, it is a mode of performance that does not require even one 'other' as the environment fulfills that role. It is a kind of response through one's organism to the total environment and its components channelled through melody, rhythm, movement through space...

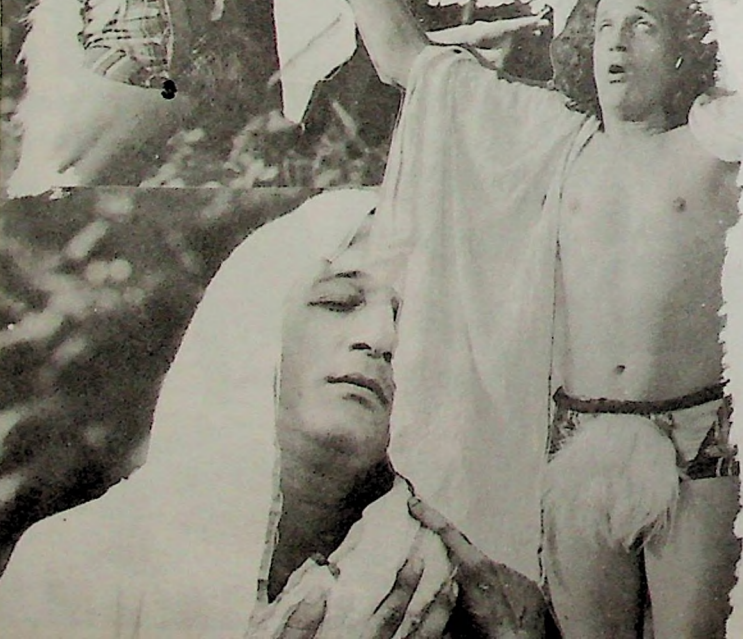
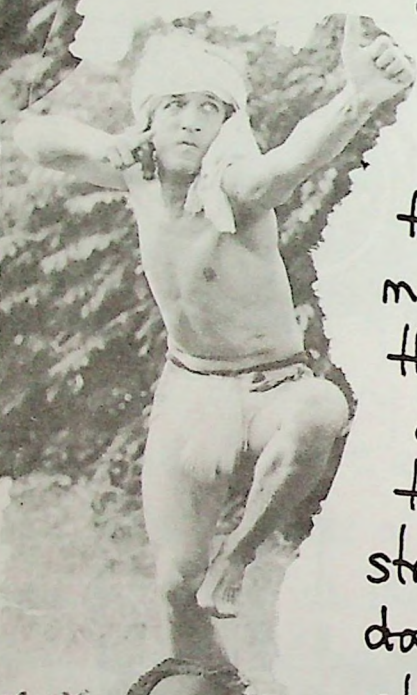
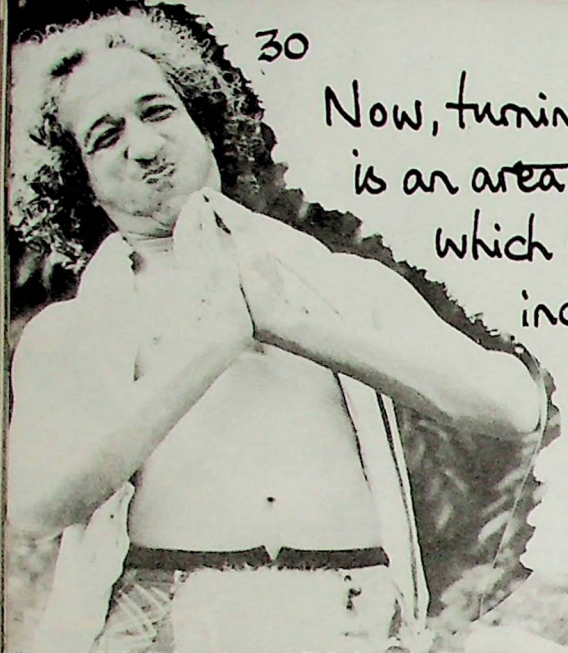




Now, turning to the arena of 'theatre' proper, there is an area of research entitled Foolsong which has so far resulted in seven incarnations of a performance. An eighth is under preparation. This is a site where several paths

Converge:

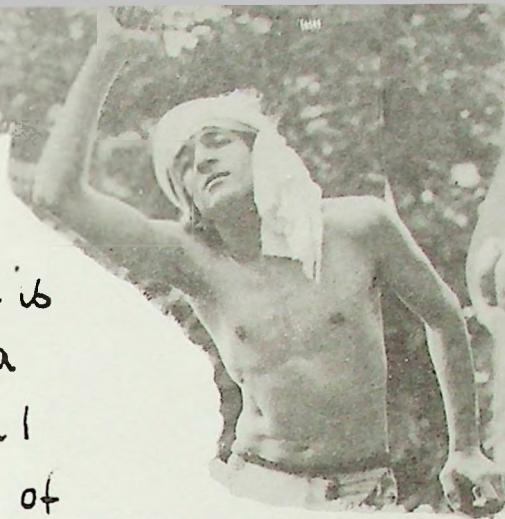
First of all, by way of content, there is a search for a means of confronting in the theatre what is dark and nebulous to one outside; a struggle to turn these dark elements into an alternative possibility through this medium of artistic expression. In this performance I have sought to span the divide between what is personal and what public, trying at the same time to provoke in the spectator a kind

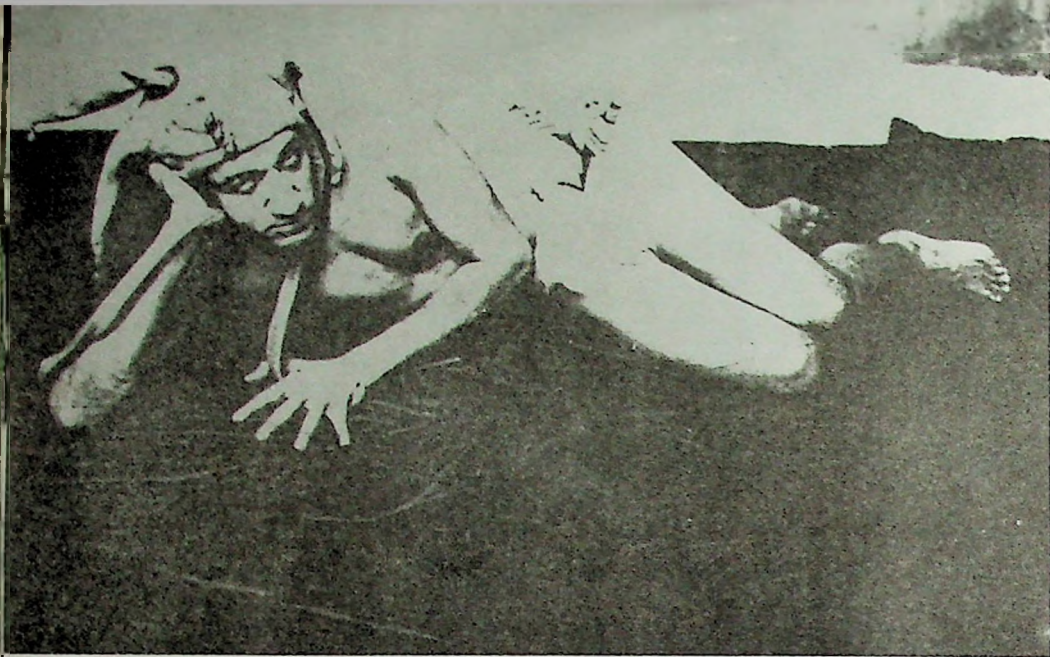


of reflection
on self and
world!

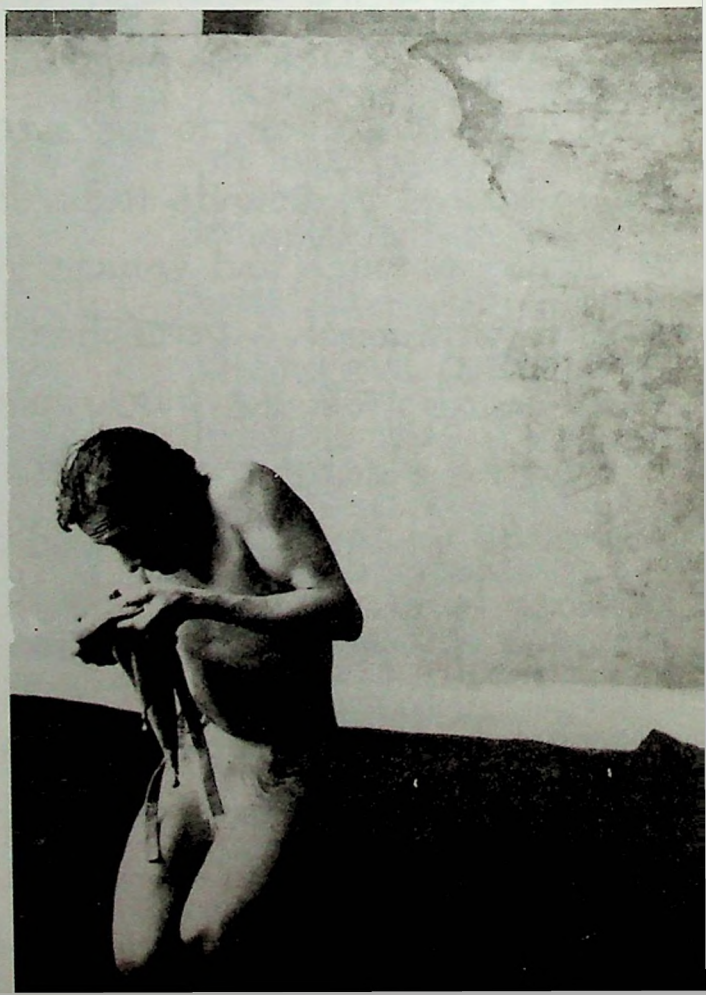
Then there is
the search for a
theatrical
language of
gesture and sound that transcends
the boundaries of regional languages.
The movement away from language is
also dictated by a desire to explore
realms beyond the actions of every-
dayness; to search for physical
icons and archetypes; to discover
the meanings of sounds rather than
of words; to touch and engage the
spectator through a perception that
veers away from the purely cerebral;
to treat the theatre space as a
hothouse where reality is lived at
another level.

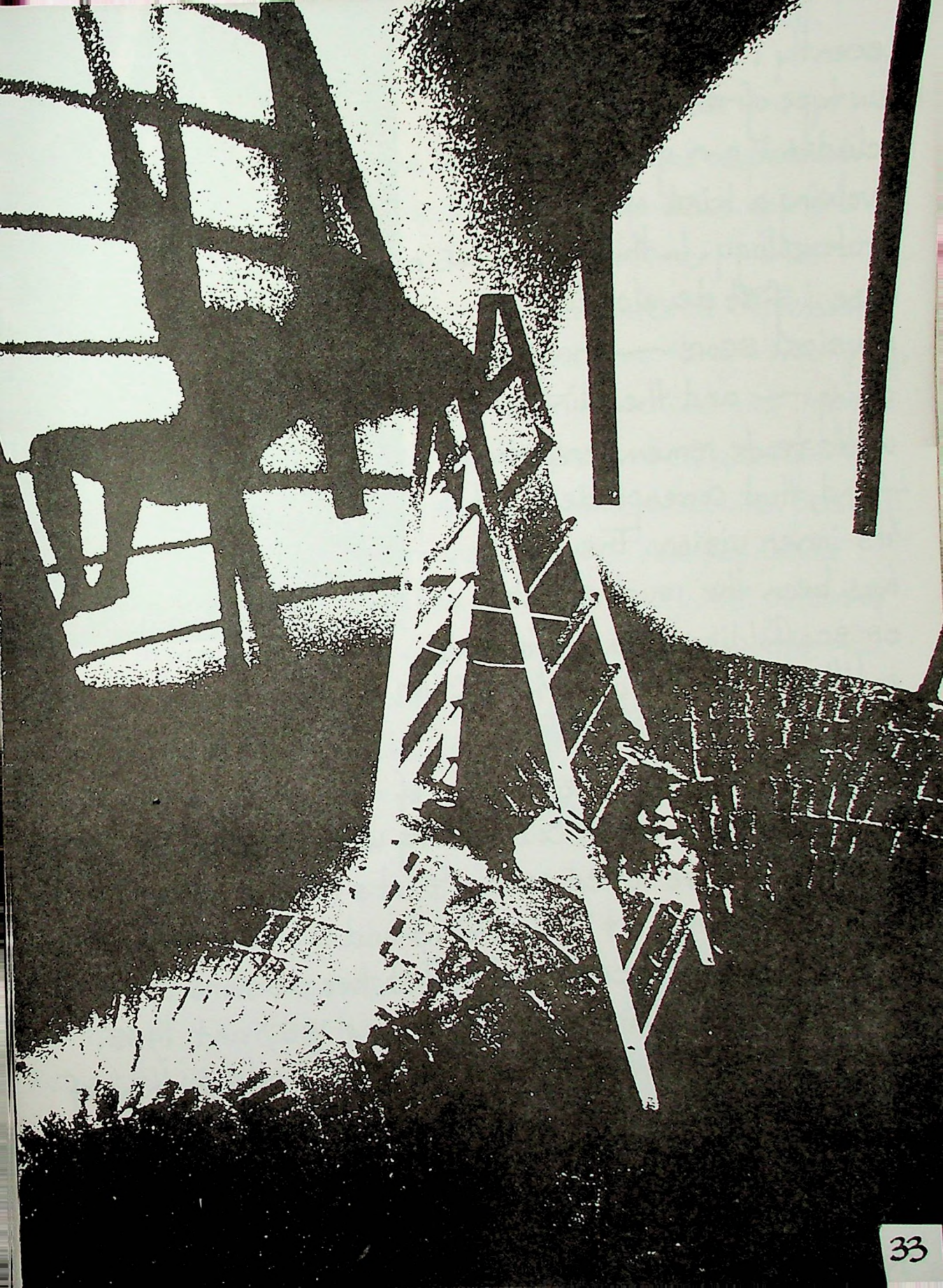
Finally, (in opposition to
General Tomfoolery where there is
elaborate costume and make-up
— *aharyabhinaya* — in order to
theatricalize everyday space) there





is a search for a theatre where the actor, stripped of all but the barest essentials is the sole instrument for the achievement of the theatrical act. One of the consequences of this poverty of means (aimed at developing the actors' art) is a theatre that is extremely flexible, mobile, and inexpensive.





34
Recently I began work on a new type of research which includes language, involving a kind of auto-archaeology. In this particular case I first developed a physical score — through doing — and then linked it with texts, remembered and found, that corresponded with its inner vision. The result has been the rough structure or scaffolding of a performance entitled 'In Search of Monér Manush'



In working towards the creation of theatre performances I have been fortunate in collaborating with two excellent people who have acted as my 'outside eyes': Jola Cynkutis in Poland and Shaupon Boshu in Pondicherry. I created the first two versions of Foolsong with Jola in Wrocław during 1987 and 1988. Last year in Poznań she was midwife in the birthing of ... Monér Manush. Shaupon has been instrumental in seeing Foolsong through a number of incarnations. Both are extraordinary teachers with the remarkable capacity to help one grope towards one's self-set goals without

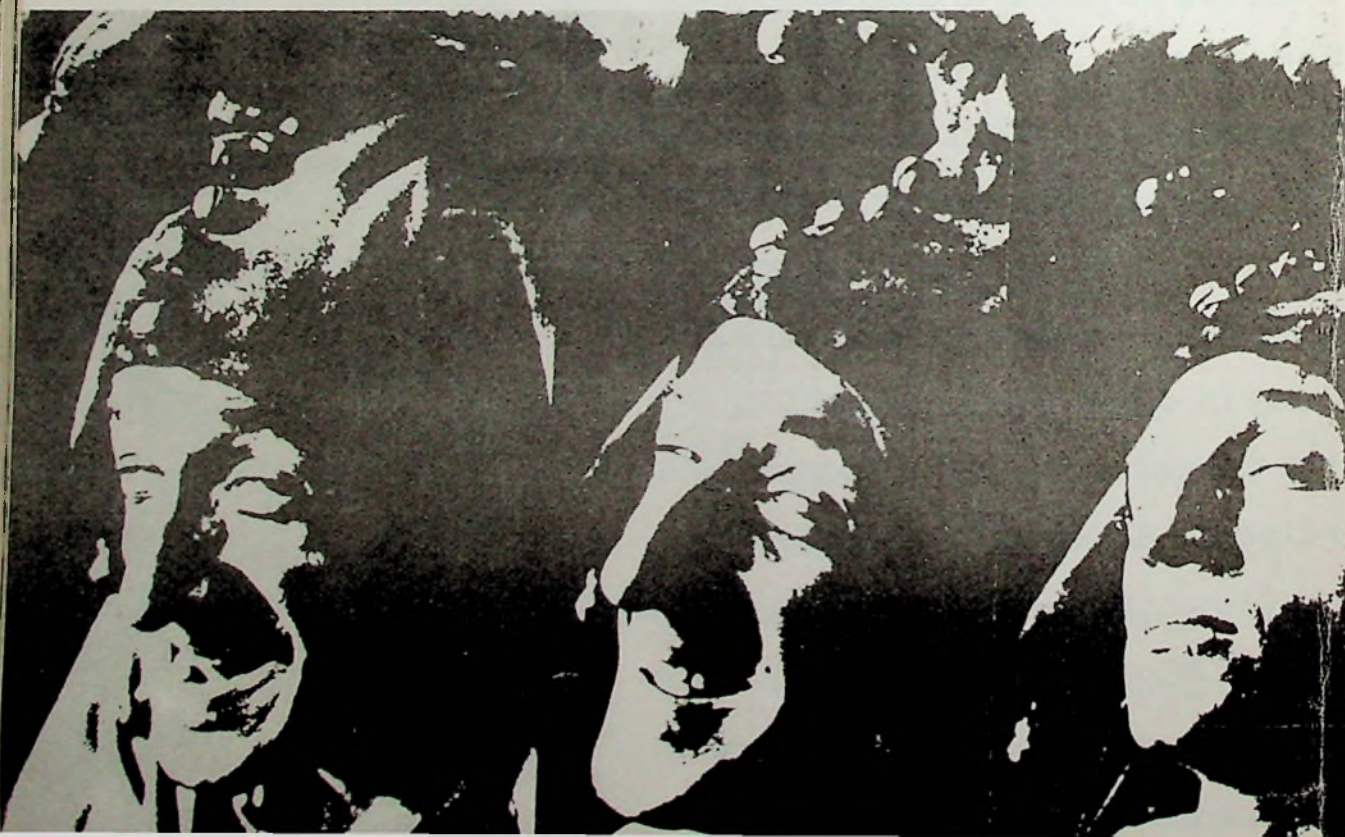
the interference of their personal fantasies. With both I share a rare sympathy in the workspace.

35

Finally, what is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of all my work is what may be termed the all-encompassing stream of the *sadhana* of the performer — an attempt to bring together interior life and external expression. In this context I look towards the traditions for principles rather than forms. I have been much influenced and inspired by Pelash Mutak, Deb, their families, and others amongst the *Durvas* of Eastar; by the Baul bridge between personal *sadhana* and public performance; by the *Natyashastra* and the *Kudiyattam* tradition as embodied in the person of Guru Ammanur Chakya. In the context of inside — outside, studying eye exercises with Venuji in Irinjalakuda has been an intellectual eye-opener into the practice of performance. Gaur Khepa, my Baul Guru, opened my eyes in other unexpected ways. He taught me many things and helped me make an important crossing. Unfortunately he was too *khepa* (crazy) and individualistic an ego to live with. I learnt I had to steer



my own boat. I am indebted to Debdas Baul, Lakhan Das and Ramchandra Mondal for labouring with me on *sur* and *tāl*; to Swami Vibhuti for illuminating their connection with interior life. Professor J. P. S. Uberoi, my university guru, has turned my world-view upside down and been instrumental in provoking it towards greater self-definition.



Bazaar, London xi. 1987.

ARTS SCENE

Photo: Maggie Murray



The Fool (Khalid Tyabji)

The Fool

While The Fool (Khalid Tyabji) was in England last November, he undertook a tour, organised by Shape*, taking him to a series of unconventional venues all over London. His audiences included users and staff of hospitals and day centres for people with physical or learning disabilities (mental handicap) and people recovering from mental illness.

The Fool elicits a strong reaction from the most diverse audiences and the performances are hilarious, subversive and highly participatory. Each show is different in a sensitive response to the mood of each group - some quiet and gentle, others rowdy and energetic, but all are built from the same elements.

The Fool uses no verbal language, making himself clearly understood by means of body language and written signs or props such as sticky sweets, a drum and, on occasion, a loud and somewhat authoritarian referee's whistle. Using all these elements, he entices unsuspecting members of the audience to become part of his living sculptures - often with hilarious results; with scant respect for authority even senior members of staff, unwarily looking in on a performance area to inspect the proceedings, are ruthlessly incorporated into a working model of the Channel Tunnel as a demonstration of his skills as a civil engineer.

Anything may happen but laughter is guaranteed.

*Shape is a London wide arts organisation which works with and for people with 'special needs' to increase their access to arts activities. Much of the work takes the form of participatory workshops but it also includes a touring programme of professional companies and individuals. The Fool's tour formed part of Shape's 1986/7 programme.

Shape

1 Thorpe Close London W10 5XL. Tel: 01-960 9245

A FEW FLATTERING REVIEWS

37

Solo performance of exceptional skill

Stage/Kavita Nagpal

It was funny. It was irreverent. It was moving. But above all Khalid Tyabji's *Footsong* (SRC Basement) was a scintillating display of exceptional skill in each facet of the art form. *Footsong* or *Gadhagaan* is a one man show sans words. It is not mime in the traditional sense of the Marcel Marceau style of mime-white mask face and no verbal sound. One has not seen Etienne Decroux perform, but what his 'shiyas' did sometime ago comes closer to *Footsong*. Even then it is different and to stretch the word to Indian solo theatre performances, unique.

Presented by TAG (Theatre Action Group) with which Khalid has had a long association — Delhi theatre buffs

will recall his excellent performance in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (TAG 1975) — *Footsong* has had a long gestation period. One had almost given up hope of a performance. It was worth the wait.

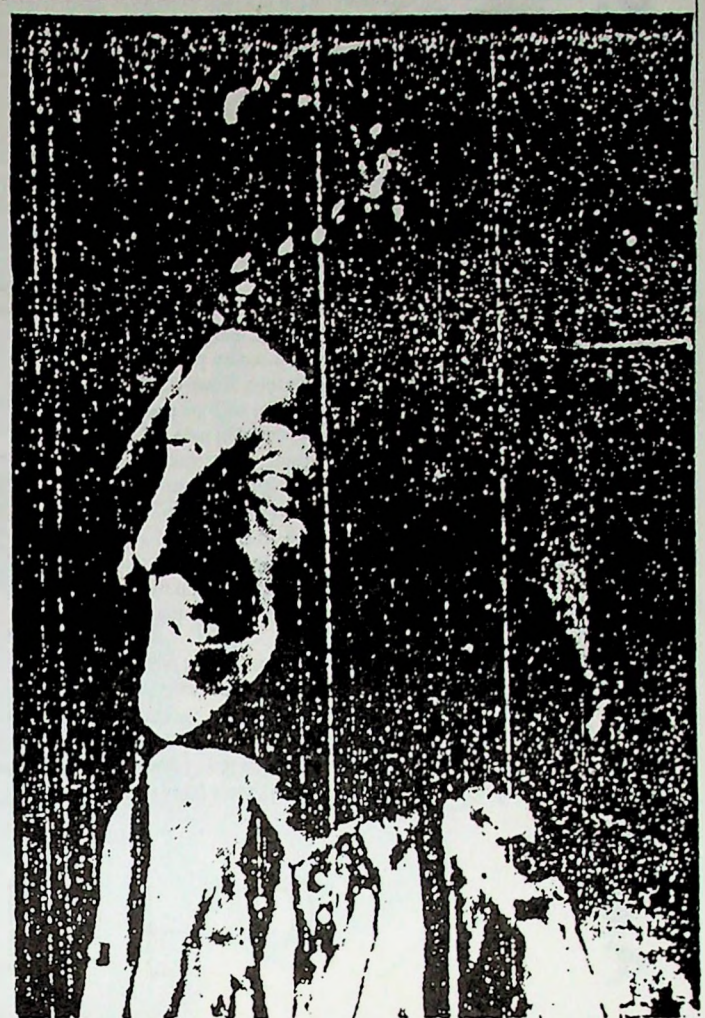
The basement theatre doors were locked at the dot of seven. This enclosed performing space created a special ritual atmosphere so important for secret communication. Khalid came out from within the audience wearing everyday clothes. He turned and greeted us with a namaste. Suddenly his body began to quiver and one heard the sound of bells vibrating much in the style of a Kathak dancer's rhythmic creation in static position. From stillness Khalid carved out posi-

tions of expressive motion as he shed his clothes and donned the fool's bell cap to complete the costume revealed.

Then the fool began to sing his 'song', a song that told the tale of his anguished country in wordless satire. The concern and content of Khalid's story was not all tragic. There were subtle moments of humour as he aped and displayed the frothy nothingness of high life — the drama of prettiness. Flags, green, saffron, white, a gun and a parallel bar were the chief substance of his props. Holding them aloft and singing wordlessly he used the flagpoles as crutches, stepping on a piece of flagrant tissue he became a titillating promise, winding a black cloth on his head and cradling a gun he was the archetypal terrorist and then a pop singer, singing a tribal ditty he was the festival of India abroad.

It is difficult to recreate in words in this space the many images created. The last lingering one was that of the dismantling of the gun, a bonfire and the tricolour over it. Khalid is a superb actor. The energy he emanated was almost tiringly demanding. And it took a while for one to respond to his teasing insistence for laughter. Rejecting the common practice of mechanical sound support Khalid created voice patterns for his finely tuned body. If there is any quarrel it is with his repetitive simpering. Khalid must devise some more gestures to convey the artificiality of existence.

Ratnabali Kant's *Facing a Nightmare Alone* at the IIC was a shared ordeal. To roll insignificant to bad sculpture, skipping about on stage in the name of dance, and pretending theatre, in one bizarre bundle, and also have the Greek Ambassador sponsor it needs some guts!



TOT, New Delhi, Khalid Tyabji in *Footsong* Nov. 1991

Economic Times, Nov. 18, 1991.

Khalid Tyebji

A bitter and sweet fool

'Foolsong' is a choreographed collection of vignettes which give a fools-eye view of contemporary Indian conditions, comments Shuddhabrata Sengupta in Delhi.

KHALID Tyebji is no common fool. Behind his grimace and within his lithe, compact, muscular frame is hidden a volatile intelligence and a singular theatrical energy. His wordless *Foolsong* is nothing if not a raucous threnody for our times. For this tender and vicious fool makes you at once the hunter and the hunted. He makes you laugh until you cry and never for a moment lets you forget that you are laughing at yourself.

Foolsong is a solo performance that has been shaping itself in Khalid's imagination for several years now. He had earlier travelled through Europe with a show that had many ingredients which have ripened to make the act what it is today - a delicately structured and choreographed collection of vignettes and responses which, while giving you a fools-eye view of the contemporary Indian condition, is also a significant point of departure for the development of a new theatrical language and sensibility.

The performance takes place in a theatre space framed as it were, by fragments of our walls and streets. A collage of torn posters, images gleaned from the coalescing worlds of advertising, politics and cinema stare at us from the walls of the auditorium. The floor of the acting area is littered with a motley collection of objects - flags, a gun, clothes, a bottle, a bow and a quiver of arrows, cardboard boxes and other strange bundles. Khalid picks each of these, sings to and with them, transforming himself into a plethora of character types. Like a 'Bahurupiya' without make-up, with nothing to adorn him but his body, voice and wit, he takes on the guise of the clowns, rock stars, communal fanatics, tribals, construction workers, terrorists, football maniacs, urethins, executives, yogis, drunkards - and several people in between as he glides from one role to the other. This encyclopaedic montage of assorted characters betrays a detailed yet distanced observational capacity that must have had something to do with Tyebji's academic training as a socio-anthropologist. Yet there is more to this gallery of portraits than that. There is in this work a latent sympathy that goes hand in hand with bitter satire - and one may add a certain moral vision: "Here, mule, is a bitter and sweet fool, and a wise one at that".

What is it that Khalid's fool wants to get through to us? Perhaps an indication that the violence in our lives has a lot to do with the straitjackets of class, nationality, religion and gender that don't ever let us be what we are. Perhaps the first step towards liberation is to laugh at, and weep for the things we have become, by stepping outside them for a while, putting on a fool's cap, putting aside the emblems of spurious identities that hide our essential weakness.

Towards the end of the performance, the fool wears his jaunty cap again, picks up the gun - that has by now become almost a metaphor for society - and breaks it apart. He then proceeds to bury it in an improvised coffin of cardboard scraps and wraps it in a shroud that unmistakably invokes a torn and tattered tricolour, with many spokes in the wheel, broken and missing. He accompanies this with a dirge, that is oddly, at the same time also a celebration. It is



KHALID Tyebji has studied sociology at the Delhi School of Economics and staged solo performances in India and in Europe. He has played the protagonist in a dramatised version of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' and also acted as the fool in a Polish production of 'King Lear'. He has devised performance art happenings for Sahmat's Janotsav in Mangolpuri and is currently teaching body-acting at the National School of Drama.

On what he misses as an actor:

I wish I had a critic, not a teacher or a guru, but someone to watch me and respond, stretch me further than I can go each time I practise an act. I used to have someone like that in Poland. A woman who worked with Grotowski, she helped me a lot. Here there is no one like that. So I am left entirely on my own resources and that can be very frustrating. On the other hand, it means I am forced to be my own audience, my own critic and maybe that too is a good thing. It helps me know my act better.

On what he'd like to do next:

I'd like to take the show out to the streets and see what happens. I'd also like to work with a team of actors. I enjoyed what we did in Mangolpuri for the Sahmat Janotsav and I think there are a lot of possibilities in that direction. But then, it may not work. I do not know if people outside a theatre would take an almost naked fool/clown seriously. Maybe I'd have to wear more clothes, play higher-status. But I can't really know until I've done it.

S.S.

possible to read this final 'trope' as an appeal for national reconciliation and renewal. But the irony and exhaustion with which it is invested, suggests alternative meanings. Perhaps it is a gently persuasive nudge, suggesting we abandon even the notion as too constricting a shell for the realisation of a human identity that is individual and yet universal. For the space and time of the performance, Khalid almost cajoles you into being yourself again, to be as unarmed, as vulnerable and naked as he is. This seduction is perhaps the greatest gift that the theatre, or for that matter any art, can give you.

There is no denying the fact that many would find room for disagreement with Khalid's act. It is also possible that many would find his satire offensive (Khalid is unsparring, and nothing, neither religious frenzy nor radical pretensions, neither machismo nor effeminate posturing escapes his wrath.) But it would be impossible to find fault with his technique and presentation. Khalid plays his athletic body like a virtuoso musician would play a cadenza on a well-tuned instrument. The energy and sheer range of his physical interaction with the performance space makes his act as much of a visual delight as ballet. Never have I seen a man fall, or throw himself about or even do a striptease with as much integrity and control on the Delhi stage. His portraits are often ugly, clumsy, awkward people. Yet, even these he imbues with an innate grace and a certain beauty. His wordless song is a bizarre and beautiful bray. Sometimes sonorous, yet delicate when it reaches the higher registers, it invents its own language and helps universalise the enactment. It reveals a powerful vocal apparatus and a phenomenal degree of breath control (when you meet Khalid offstage, he is a surprisingly quiet, almost silent man).

Behind his performance lies years of gruelling practice, and the refinement of the body as an expressive medium. But there is also imagination, observation and intense intelligence. Virtues hard to find in today's theatre. Khalid's slow needs to travel out and indeed it can, for there is something in it which everyone will be able to relate to. Be it the venerable priest praying to an absent god, the executive emboldened by his tie and the power it brings, the politician waving a dirty rag of a flag, the drunkard or the yogi inflated like a hot-air balloon with vacuum wisdom.

If fools rush in where angels fear to tread, then I'd forsake the angels for a while and go a long way with this fool.

'Foolsong' will be repeated at the Shri Ram Centre Basement theatre on November 22, 23, 25 and 26.

The Pioneer, New Delhi, 1.1992.

The Fool's amongst us



FOOTLIGHTS

Keval Arora

Khalid Tyabji's

Foolsong

The fool is amongst us. He emerges from our shadows as we sit facing a playing area littered with all kinds of objects. Racked by laughter, taut with wailing, his entire frame quivers as he disrobes on stage to reveal the bells and the patched dress of a Fool. The Fool is within us.

Not quite, though. We lack his enabling perspective and his ability to laugh and mourn. These he demonstrates as he winds his way through the contemporary Indian maze, offering insights into our contradictions and our failures. In the process, we meet ourselves several times over -- as the opportunist politician, the brutalized tribal, the violated woman, the bayoneted child, the marionette executive and the prying journalist, to name a few. These images, each evoked with brief but telling clarity, are not all negative: there are haunting moments of tenderness and dignity too. At the end, the Fool merges back into the audience, faces the stage and applauds what has just been. The Fool is (hopefully) us.

This is the broad structure of *Foolsong*, playing at the SRC Basement Theatre till January 31. It is the creation of a "one man-actor-fool", Khalid Tyabji. Though the theme of the wisdom of folly is common to several cultural traditions, the parentage of Khalid's Fool, by

virtue of his three-cornered cap, is more specifically European. He is a distinguished addition to a long line of philosophers with mischievous smiles and piercing eyes.

In some aspects, however, he is crucially different. The fact that he is alone on stage, that he speaks no language, and that he is not part of a story is enough to signal major departures from the tradition of the Fool, let alone from the practices of the conventional theatre.

Foolsong is a "fringe" performance; yet, it also represents a



Khalid Tyabji in *Foolsong*

return to the fundamental postulates of theatre. A Grotowski-an insistence on the bare essentials -- a theatre without frills -- is revealed in the rigorously simple costumes, props and lighting, and the absence of amplified sound. All we have is a space and a single actor. Unlike monoacting where the focus is on an actor's skill in portraying different characters, Khalid uses the fact of a solo performer to establish linkages. Accuracy in insight rather than in imitation is his main concern.

The mimetic style is similarly abandoned in the use of body and voice. Words are replaced by gestures and sounds that do not aim at reproducing psychological or social conditions, but at revealing essential states. Acting becomes a combination of visual and aural signs instead of a replication of natural behaviour and speech. Khalid's intention in deploying this transparent, "theatrical" technique is to transcend linguistic boundaries. This works only to a point: the text is culture-

specific and therefore access remains restricted. In fact, quite the converse occurs. Not possessing the specificity that words do, this "transparent" language is often obscure, thereby giving to *Foolsong* a density and a stimulating ambivalence in meaning.

There is another reason for such ambivalence. *Foolsong* has no story, no casual/chronological links between its various parts. There are some linear movements, but its unity is really that of a mosaic. Images, props and actions are bonded together through a technique of montage. The mother cradles her baby, the terrorist fondles his gun -- the same crooning sound continues through both. A corporate sector necktie becomes a puppet's string or a hangman's noose. A little girl plays with her dress unselfconsciously raised; a rape victim screams as her dress is raised. This method is richly suggestive even as (or, because?) it poses difficulties in interpretation.

Such a form demands exceptional talent. Khalid Tyabji has it in ample measure. His vocal range, physical control and expressive skills are amongst the best in Delhi theatre today. And yet, they pose a real threat to *Foolsong*. It is very tempting to admire Khalid's performance primarily as a virtuoso display. Several audiences have done just that, prompting him to reduce the degree of difficulty of some of his movements. An unusual problem for a theatre starved for such skills!

There is another problem arising from the structure that *Foolsong* adopts. As a critique of contemporary culture, *Foolsong* is intellectually rather thin; its images function as a series of closed assertions rather than questions. This absence of dialectical tensions sometimes reduces *Foolsong* to a guessing game where the act of decoding becomes the major intellectual exercise.

Skirting linguistic boundaries



FOOTLIGHTS

Keval Arora

Foolsong Four

Khalid Tynbji is arguably the finest actor to emerge from TAG. The interests of this "one man-actor-fool", as he styles himself, have long since diverged from the preoccupations of mainstream theatre—though, it is possible to see TAG's work with spastics and other special-interest groups as a probable connection.

It was fitting, therefore, that Khalid's latest work, *Foolsong Four*, was featured in the TAG Festival. There can be no better tribute than this to TAG's performance style which often emphasised theatrical imagery and body movement, and in the process loosened the hold of those tiresome "D's"—Dialogue, Dictation and Delivery—which still shackle the English-language theatre. (That one continued to hear "Imported" accents in TAG productions may have more to do with the Anglocentric delusions of the class which flocks to such theatre groups, than any whip cracked by the director.)

In *Foolsong Four*, Khalid blithely transcended such problems. His show—"an exploration of the dark face of contemporary Indian reality"—was altogether without words. It had sounds, but not language as we speak it. There are real advantages in this approach.

For instance, *Foolsong Four* gained in accessibility by skirting the linguistic boundaries that segment audiences and performances according to language use. Of course, its communicative power still depends upon the cultural space within which it is performed, but there is no denying

that "culture" is a far more diffuse and porous entity.

An added advantage lay in the alternative theatrical language that this facilitated. Its Grotowskian insistence on the bare essentials in which nothing more than an empty space and an actor's body is needed, signalled a return to the basic postulates of theatre. This is what Khalid's one-man show provided.

Freed of the mechanics of realistic representation, accuracy in insight rather than in

This is the perspective of the Fool, a figure common to diverse performance traditions. Unlike the merry antics of the Jester or the clown, the Fool's laughter is tinged by the sadness that flows from his ironic appraisals of humanity. He is purely a stage figure—there is no social equivalent of the Fool.

Khalid's use of the persona was as dependent upon this social invisibility as upon the Fool's reputation as a sad yet sparkling truth-teller. Both combined to give *Foolsong*

ence, disrobed, donned the Fool's cap and then, imitating the postures of audience-members, peered at them as intently as they did him. At the end, he returned to his clothes, to the audience, and applauded the show that had just concluded. The cheeky mirroring confirmed that we are his real targets: Both as performers in this dreary landscape and as passive onlookers who believe that approval of worthy causes exempts us from acting upon them.



Communicating without words: Khalid

imitation became the prime criterion of this physical language. Thus, sounds and gestures in Khalid's performance bore little mimetic weight: they functioned more as aural and visual emblems in a compressed theatrical shorthand. As these lacked the pointedness of words, the language they constituted was often stimulatingly ambivalent in meaning.

An interesting corollary is that Khalid did not disappear behind his creations—a procedure conventionally associated with "good" acting. Instead, he highlighted his presence as a performer to demonstrate linkages between the figures he evoked, and also to thereby anchor the critical perspective that authors *Foolsong Four*.

Four its special aura of airy-fairy value.

The truths that the Fool revealed through sound-language and expressive gesture were structured as a montage of images, or "physical icons", to quote Khalid. Some communicated immediately (the macho motorcyclist); others involved progressive exaggeration, for instance the yogi who, brimming with benediction, bursts like a balloon; yet others gathered sharpness only when viewed through a contrasting frame—the displaced tribal metamorphosing into the urban construction labourer.

Two moments straddled and contextualised this mosaic of criticisms. At the beginning, Khalid emerged from the audi-

Much of this material was carried over from a previous version. (*Foolsong Four* is presumably the fourth.) The difference now was that, with the exception of a white cloth used in various ways, no props were employed here. In contrast, the earlier version was littered with the debris of the contemporary scene.

The gains from such austerity are both practical (a portable show) and aesthetic (a minimalist style). Yet, there are perceptible losses. The most obvious—the loss of visual variety—can be ignored as a calculated risk. More irreplaceable is the reduction in the tangible friction between the Fool and his environment as materialised through objects that possess texturally a separate reality. The "conflict" in the earlier model is now softened by the reconciliative presence of the miming performer who authors both his own "self" and the "other" which oppresses him.

Yet, it is no criticism of *Foolsong Four* to say that it holds less promise than the previous version. The attractive aspect of Khalid's work is that he is constantly innovating and refining his material. That's why *Foolsong* is such an appropriate title. Like a song, one can return to it again and again.

The Pioneer, Tuesday, October 26, 1993

Deccan Herald Bangalore, i. 1994

Not just a children's show

Laxmi Chandrashekar on an artiste who believes that the magic of theatre is that it can be created out of nothing.

'Foolsong 4 1/2', a unique solo-performance by Khalid Tyabji, was presented at the Alliance Française by 'Artscape' in collaboration with 'Kadambari', a cultural group which has been responsible for introducing the Bangalore audience to some very special theatre events and persons in recent years.

A Delhi-based performer of international fame, Khalid Tyabji was scheduled to perform in Bombay for a festival this month. Finding himself at a loose-end when the festival got performed, he decided to spend a few days in Bangalore. During his stay in the city he also conducted a six-day workshop on the physical training of an actor under the auspices of 'Kadambari' and gave a series of performances of the 'Foolsong' at schools, which are members of the 'Newspapers In Education' project.

Though 'Foolsong 4 1/2' has been performed for school children, it is not really meant to be a children's show. It is a theatrical confrontation of the harsher realities of modern life through the character of the 'Fool', created during Khalid's stay in Poland (1986-88) in collaboration with Jola Cynkults. 'Foolsong', for Khalid, is 'an ongoing site of research' which has already undergone several revisions. Since in its present form, it is not sufficiently distinct from the IV version to be called V, it has been entitled 'Foolsong 4 1/2'.

The fool, a common figure in all literatures and cultures, is an archetypal entertainer-critic. Always a loner, he is at once an alien and a critical insider. A costumed performer even within the make-believe world of the play, he stands at a distance from its happenings and enjoys a special licence to attack all institutions and individuals. No authority is too sacred for him. Being a professional entertainer, he is able to convert even the gloomiest aspects of life into theatrically enjoyable moments. The fool's guise offered many possibilities to the idealistic young Khalid, in search of a form which would bridge the gap between him and the people he wanted to interact with. It would even help him transcend linguistic barriers and communicate through the body.

Khalid had been brooding over the character of the fool ever since he had played the role of the 'wise fool' in Shakespeare's 'King Lear' directed by Barry John for his Delhi-based 'Theatre Action Group'. Starting his theatre career in 1974 with TAG, Khalid played major roles in a wide variety of English language productions and worked on all aspects of theatre. A study of the writings of the Polish artist, Jerzy Grotowski, changed his concept of theatre and he left the TAG after six years' association with the group to explore the possibilities of an alternative.

Grotowskian concept of theatre which could communicate solely through the body of the actor. His association with Bengali playwright-actor-director, Badal Sircar, stimulated him to think about the relationship between art and society. His interaction with the tribals of Central India helped him evolve a mode of participatory performance which he later called 'General Tomfoolery'. The need to play two totally different roles of the city man and the performer — while he remained himself, and the desire to overcome the suspicion of the tribal people, turned him into a fool. To put it in his own words — "I sought a self-explanatory theatrical presence in order to explain who I was and to communicate the friendly nature of my visit — to give a gift that was not material, but something of oneself." The uninhibited tribals participated willingly in this playful act and accepted him as one of them.

Later, in Delhi and during his travels in Europe, Khalid adapted this mode of performance, which involves playing 'with'

T H E A T R E

rather than 'for' people, for urban contexts as well. He has used this mode of theatrical exchange not only for interacting with people of different communities, but even for therapeutic purpose with the mentally ill and the retarded. Based on 'General Tomfoolery' Khalid has evolved two other shows — 'Dance of the Mirror' and 'Foolshow'.

Ever since he returned to India in 1988, after a three-year stay in Europe, during which time he taught and performed in a number of countries, Khalid has been touring the country on his motorcycle, conducting theatre workshops and performing various versions of his 'Foolsong'. Until recently he was the leader of training at the NSD Repertory Company and visiting professor of Vocal and Physical training at the National School of Drama. He has no faith in the 'Universal Actor' who knows all kinds of acting, (Khalid calls him 'the Klehdi actor'), he has decided to start a professional group.

Though Khalid has been a solo performer for several years, it is not so much by choice as necessity. His intention has always been to start a professional group. He has been in search of actors who share his concern and are ready for long, arduous training before they begin performing. Then, there is the problem of money, of course. Khalid is very particular about where the money comes from. He refuses to accept corporate sponsorship. He does not like ticketed performances and hates chasing grants. Alone, he has been able to survive. His needs are simple. He carries his entire home on his motorcycle and is content to wear a motley dress. He has even gone hungry on many days. But, a group will need more resources. Initially, he hopes to earn money by taking up short assignments abroad to subsidise the activity at home. But eventually he hopes his

group would become self-sufficient. His eight-member group will be based in Pastor and even draw some of its members from there.

'Foolsong 4 1/2' embodies everything theatre means to Khalid. Its form and content are subservient to the needs of society. It is a medley of images from contemporary life. Though Khalid does not identify himself with any particular ideological group, his stand is broadly socialist. All forms of religious and political hypocrisy, corruption, violence and sexual abuse are targeted for attack. The melancholic fool slings of many social evils which have given him pain. Khalid confesses he has not found theatrical expression for many of them and is constantly reworking the images he presents for better communication.

With every new version, the 'Foolsong' has moved closer to the concept of a theatre where 'the actor, stripped of all but the barest essentials, is the sole means of achieving the theatrical act.' The earlier versions had used more props, masks, make-up and costume-elements. But now, all these have been discarded. 'The magic of theatre is that it can be created out of nothing' says Khalid. All he needs now for a show are his fool's cap, a piece of cloth, a lighted space and an audience.

Khalid prefers to stay anonymous among the audience until it is time to begin. While all eyes look eagerly towards the wings, he saunters into the acting area from their midst and methodically strips himself of his modern clothes until he stands before them naked except for a pair of briefs sewn with animal fur, transformed at once into the wise fool and the primitive tribal in his state of innocence. The graceful movements of the tribal hunter and his joyful dance are in total contrast to the ugly contortions his body goes through as he depicts political opportunism, religious frenzy, sexual violence and the dehumanising influence of power and money. There is protest against developmental programmes which have deprived the tribals of their hunting grounds and forced them into construction labour.

Unlike traditional mime artists, Khalid considers voice (not language) as an integral part of the body and employs sound and movements for communicating his vision of life. The nightmarish vision which begins with the loss of the cap ends when the fool finds his cap and dons it again. The gesture makes one wonder if Khalid is escaping into a fool's paradise. But he confesses the need to avoid a gloomy end and to energise people to do something about the world. Besides, the loss of cap symbolises the loss of wisdom and the fool regains his balance when he finds it. The act ends with Khalid tucking the folded cloth and cap under his arm, putting on his everyday clothes and returning to his seat among the audience. He joins the audience in their applause as if applauding the art which has brought about the moment.

Khalid will be back in the city in a few weeks time to perform his 'Foolsong 4 1/2' for those children and adult who have missed the show.

LAXMI CHANDRASHEKAR

Going solo with a tragi-comic world view

Khalid Tyabji, whose one-man show today forms part of the Prithvi Theatre Festival, uses wit to demolish institutions, including corporate sponsorship

By MAHESH RAMCHANDANI

The solitary actor has found his fool's cap and returned from his nightmare world, which is also the real world, to melt into the audience. *Foolsong 4 1/2* is over. Joyfulness, the domain of fools, dreamers and idealists, and perhaps all of us, is the only way to be. The public has just seen itself and the rest of society unmasked single-handedly on stage by Khalid Tyabji. The hall of funny mirrors is closed for the day.

Tyabji is the joker in the pack who is all the cards and still the same, the actor who is all of us — harried yuppie, motorcycle maniac, disco-cruiser, primed-up socialite, wannabe rock star, numb journalist, corrupt politician, religious fanatic, uncorrupted tribal, exploited worker — and then himself, a part of the audience. Alone, with silence and a range of sounds, he demolishes entire institutions.

"I use sound because sound transcends the barrier of language... especially in this country with its many languages," says the intrepid actor, who has been hopping between cities and tribal areas, conveying his tragi-comic worldview and cocking his biting snooks at all. In an age deluged by information and words, Tyabji's sounds overcome the gibberish the former have been reduced to.

"The idea is also to get away from the cerebral perception, so the meaning of sound rather than the meaning of words is important." Tyabji has also done away with make-up because he is interested, as he says, in using the mask that is the face. Armed with a quicksilver face, a body that's taut but as flexible as rope, and a long, white piece of cloth that is transformed in his hands from machine-gun to



The face as mask: Tyabji motorbike handlebar, he guides the viewer from deep contemplation to pure guffawing.

The total effort is a result of training in theatre since '74, gymnastics at the college level, an abandoned Ph.D. on an esoteric subject — 'before the age of scientific thought' or some such — and influences that include his teacher Barry John, Badal Sircar and several others.

It all started, however, with his regular forays into tribal areas whose inhabitants he empathises with strongly. The sounds and silence onstage, his sparse attire, his animal-hide loincloth are symbolic of a return to roots, to a lost paradise. Offstage, in his cotton kurta and pants and a quaint pair of leather shoes, the middle-aged actor resembles members of the vanishing tribe of Bohemians. "I have been performing alone since '78 in tribal areas where I go very

often," he says. "I would just go there, a total stranger, and uninvited, I would launch into my routine by imitating one of them."

The imitation would be enough to break the ice and what often began as a bit of tomfoolery would, at times, go on into the night. Despite their suspicion of strangers, Tyabji ascribes his success with them to the fact that villagers, as also slum-dwellers, are more receptive to body language. "It's because they enjoy the physical sense of humour and are more active with their bodies," he says.

Going up to a village he has never visited before, standing outside its borders and beating his drum to draw them out is one of the things he does often. Tyabji remembers the time when, in a village in Orissa, he came upon the chief with his grandson in the village square. "The men were out hunting and the women wouldn't come out of their homes," Tyabji started mimicking the child and later, with both of them, perfect strangers, laughing at his antics, the rest of the village joined in. "They brought out their instruments. We drank together, became friends and I ended up staying there."

The same is considered low humour by city-dwellers and rejected, he says, because they feel ridiculed, surrounded as they are by strangers in the city. It could be misinterpreted as an act of hostility but if he does succumb to the temptation, residents of Juhu will get to see him some day take his shot at the morning joggers as they trudge "self-importantly" in pursuit of the perfect body.

The social satire, however, is not a weapon for the actor. "I'm trying to find a more joyful way of

performing and I want it to be a combination of both the comic and the tragic. The audience shouldn't leave the auditorium feeling depressed, but engaged about what I'm trying to convey," he says.

In the range of characters he unveils, Tyabji also includes himself, perhaps unwittingly. "Being human, one is prone to folly. I smoke, ride a bike, drink and enjoy dancing myself," he says, referring to the shallowness and the machismo of the motorcyclist and others he takes a dig at in *Foolsong 4 1/2*. "but the point is the attitude." And if his caricaturing and the swipes are perceived as cruel, then so be it. After all, he reasons, the blitz of vacuous messages and the tomtomming of a superficial lifestyle by the business community and its arm, the advertisers, does undermine and negate an alternative and better way of life. "That, I believe, is cruel and unthinking," he says.

This is so strongly felt, in fact, that in a day and age when everything, except maybe newborn babies, are sponsored by some cola or chewing-gum company, Tyabji has no intentions of soliciting corporate support for his future projects, including one which is a reflection on the tribal situation. "The values embodied in my work are contrary to corporate values, and I don't like to advertise a product as part of my endeavour." In a festival, he admits, one does become part of it. "But I don't subscribe to this sort of thing aesthetically."

The viewpoint is perfectly congruous with the universe he inhabits, where they still smoke unfiltered Charminars. But a self-assured Tyabji intends braving it against the tide in his search for Paradise Lost.

SHADOWS against tall grey slabs reaching for the dusk. A crescent silver moon peeping through the tall ashoka trees. Terracotta bricks laid out in teasing circles for players to trace their dream steps on. An audience arrayed in an amphitheatre, silent in appreciation of the unmasking of a searching soul at their very feet. And the unasked questions that teemed the air.

What is a theatrical poem? Can an individual hold a diverse audience rivetted for a concentrated spell of time? Can a script put together from varied voices speak in a single tone?

The power and potency of Khalid Tyabji's work in progress, *In search of Moner Manush*, premiered recently at Mahesh's Studio at JP Nagar in Bangalore, explored inner landscapes with daring — and provided a few answers. With his taut frame, aureole of grey-streaked hair, and minimalist garb, Tyabji seemed to be a man with a mission — to return theatre to its very essentials, stripped of all trappings that distract.

Poised as a being verging on a shadow, these "scenes from a waking dream of a journey in search of the man of my heart," walked miles with major minds of all time, yoking together gems from the Upanishads and Yevtushenko, Tukaram and Paulo Coelho, Milarepa and R D Laing, Tagore and Don Juan to form a poetic chain of thought that resonated long after the last words echoed through the ether.

Sure-stepped, steeped in poetry, Tyabji invested the passages he traversed with a magnitude that

was magical. His body language, wrapped around the versatile ladder that was his single prop, teased and hammered, veiled and revealed, prised and concealed the inner self, the mask that conceals the man, the mind beyond the mirror.

Whether crouched in a foetal knot, or ferally balanced and still chanting atop the top slat of the ladder, or swinging through circular space with the prop cutting a swath through the evening air, or mating with his alter ego as shadow meets shadow, Tyabji rose above the immediate, the particular, the identifiable, to scale a spatial plane above the tangible and the mundane.

Unlike his earlier success with *Foolsong 4 1/2*, this composition skirted political satire, to dwell in inner wellsprings that are the very fuel of dreamers transformed into doers. For what's a dreamer without a soul? A mere skeleton

without shadow or substance.

And his unusual do-it-yourself script — self-explorations couched in the dialect of the interior — proved its coherence as it was unspooled.

Born of a collaboration with his

'A journey in search of the man of my heart'

THEATRE

KHALID TYABJI's work-in-progress, 'In search of Moner Manush,' recently premiered in Bangalore, explored inner landscapes, discovers ADITI DE. He seemed to be a man with a mission — to return theatre to its very essentials, stripped of all trappings that distract.

Pollish friend Jola Cynkutis — who was instrumental in the birth of *Foolsong* in 1987 — this work-in-progress now has a "scaffolding, a script and a physical score," in Tyabji's words.

But is that enough for a complete theatre experience?

It was — even to an audience brought up on theatre as spectacle, replete with grandiose dialogue and ornate costumes and sets. Owning as much to Jerzy Grotowski's pared down Poor Theatre as to the Natyashastra that recognises the worth of the actor as "creator, medium and instrument of theatre," Tyabji adventures into the arena of "the unadorned and unadorned actor."

And proves that the actor *is* the theatre, all else is ephemeral. For through the intense 40 minutes of performance — initially lit by torch beams, later supplemented by spots — Tyabji wrested the attention of the audience by sure degrees, testing their responses by

swift changes of mien and mood, taming his being into subservience to the physical score, conquering the intimate space around. Through it all, he proved that an intelligent mind can invite like minds to an encounter that is intrinsically drama.

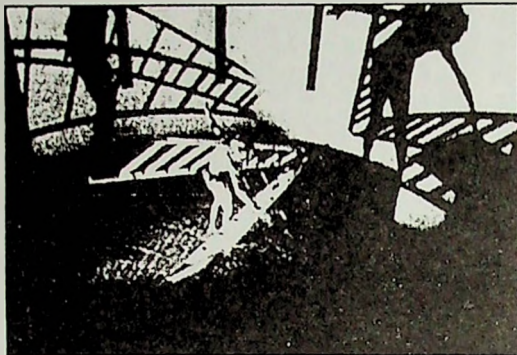
Tyabji's theatrical sense is immaculate. He recognises the creative spark for the irresistible impulse it is. As both director and solo player, Tyabji is unafraid to be self-critical. Or to reach beyond the stars. And that is his basic strength.

Even in the incorporation of Bengali and Sanskrit passages into a "mainly English" script, Tyabji proved that the body and the mind are the basics of theatre, communicative beyond words. He owes much to sources of enrichment that include Guru Ammanur Chakravarthy of *Kuliyattam* and the legendary *Baul* Gour Khepa.

Like T E Lawrence, who says, "Dreamers of the day are danger-

ous for they may act out their dream with open eyes to make it possible," the evening finally was a coming together of two dreamers — Khalid Tyabji who sang the song of an open road, and playwright Mahesh Dattani, whose new studio was the scene of its enactment. Aesthetically designed, the studio is an ideal space for cross-disciplinary "intuitive expression." As Dattani sees it, "My particular focus will be on developing new plays by new voices in the theatre. Workshops for playwrights, actors, directors will generate a greater awareness of the nature of exploration in the arts, rather than seeing an art form as a successful representation of established ideas."

What a triumph of the human spirit the initial fusion of dreams at the studio proved to be. More daring then to the dreamers of the world. May they grow from fantasy in inspiration with each successive encounter



Questing ideas find a voice (Photographs: Adil Hussain)



Stripped to the very essence

Bangalore, Deccan Herald, iv, 1998.





NOTES ON THE TRUST

TOWARDS COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOUR

With the help, support and encouragement of my former teacher and supervisor at Delhi University, Prof. J.P.S. Uberoi and Ann Britto, my staunchest ally and most fanciful co-dreamer of recent years in Bangalore, I 'authored' the Theatre Trust in May 1997.

The principal aim in so doing was to create the administrative, organizational and financial basis for a professional theatre ensemble of actors under my initial artistic direction.

Such an ensemble is intended to extend the areas of my personal activity into the collective sphere and to explore other performative avenues that are beyond the reach of the solo performer.

At the core of it all is a knowledge of the possibility of a type of human encounter — a possibility I want to explore and to share with a wider number of people. To undertake the research and put ideas into practice such an ensemble

is necessary.

Later, members of the present company are expected to identify their own areas of special interest and continue to develop their endeavour with groups of similarly inclined apprentices.

As laid out in the Trust deed, the company (as yet unchristened!) is intended to do the following:

~ Treat the whole of India (and indeed the world) as source and stage, in contrast to most theatre groups which, like most Indians, are strongly rooted in one region, working in one language.

Our aim is to seek to transcend linguistic barriers through a theatrical language that either does not use conventional words or one that works in a multiplicity of languages.

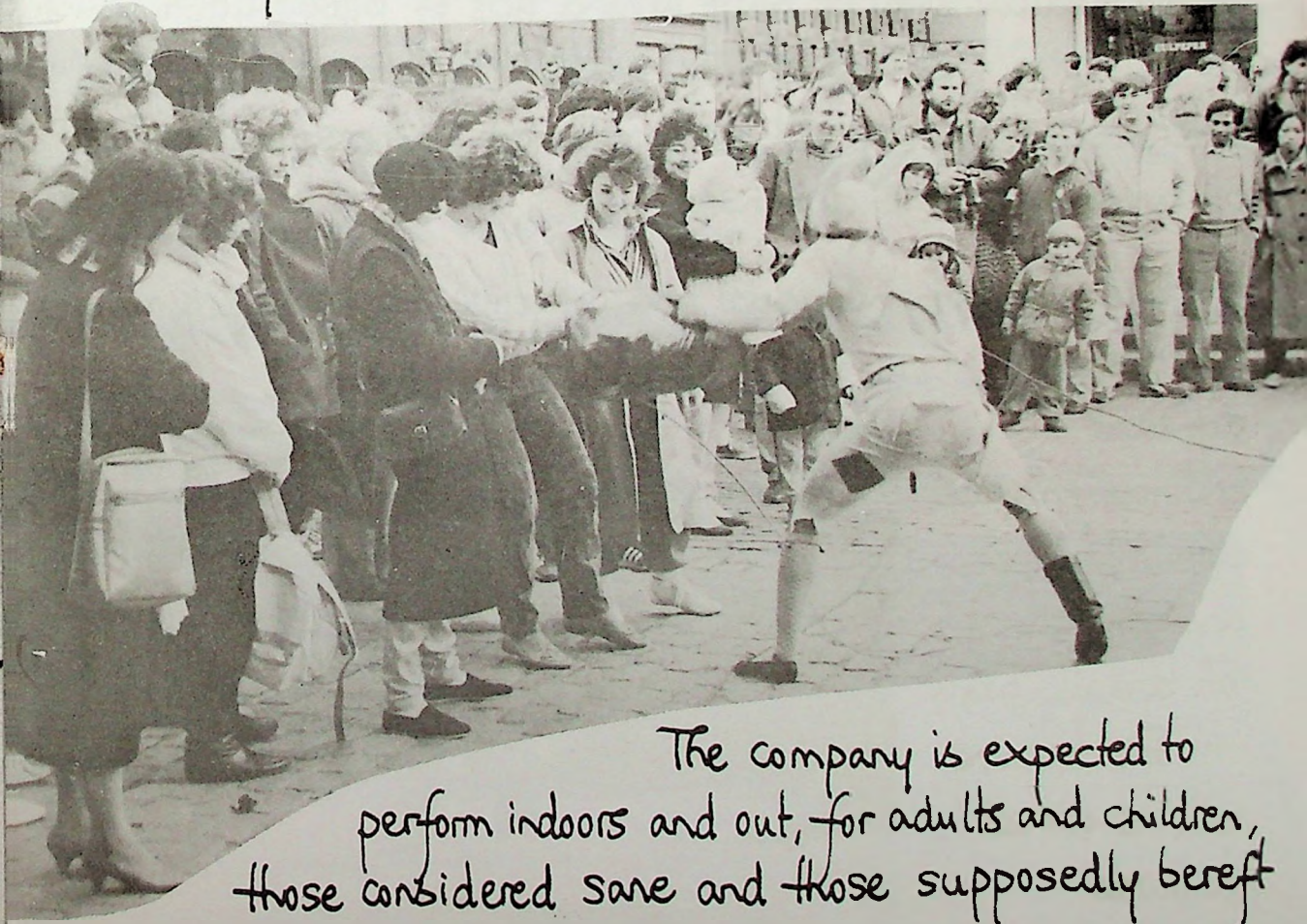
~ address issues of contemporary culture and function... in the widest possible diversity of social and physical environments.





- ~ examine the place and scope of theatre today as a site of critical self-reflection, vision, transformation...
- ~ consider the art of the human actor to be at the core of theatrical practice, focusing on the heritage and possibility of the actors' means (sāttvika, vacika, sarira, āhāryabhinaya,
- ~ investigate the relation between traditions of performance and contemporary theatre.

- ~ transcend the divisions between 'traditional' ('folk', 49 'classical') and 'modern' through practical dialogue, interaction and exchange.
- ~ discover means of theatrical exchange with other performers and groups, both contemporary and traditional; create a site for exchanges between other performers.
- ~ extend the boundaries of theatre into areas of public space not usually considered to comprise its domain ~ in keeping with the principle that theatre can take place anywhere and at any time provided both actor and spectator are represented in a shared space



The company is expected to perform indoors and out, for adults and children, those considered sane and those supposedly bereft



of sanity, those free
and those incarcerated,
those healthy and those
suffering from ill-health
— in India and
abroad, city and country,
for university professors
and tribal hunters,

diplomats and those who live on the street.

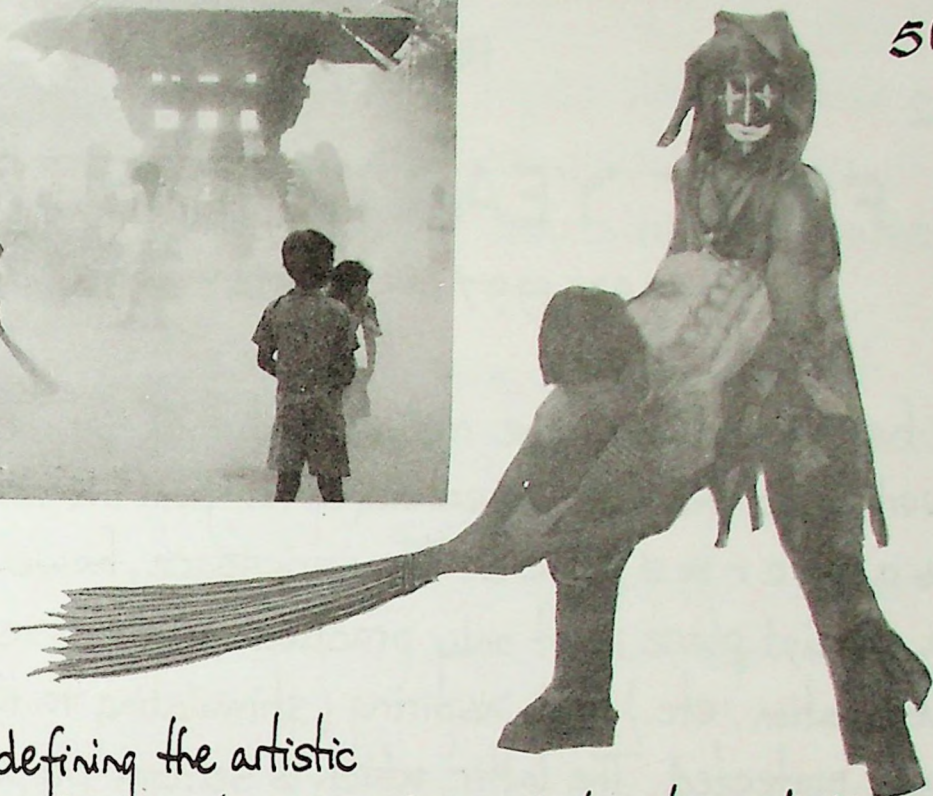
~ Organize/create large-scale public participatory events.

These may be purely oriented towards the generation of good 'humour (an old medical term) or built around acts of public utility, such as sweeping and cleaning the public environment. In case of the latter, the sweeping will be considered as the springboard for an event of artistic dimension.

~ Develop both individual and collective training which may be adapted to different environments and circumstances, and continued on a daily basis.

This training
will be aimed
towards





challenging and defining the artistic identity of each performer who will work in collaboration with his or her colleagues and in partnership with the director/leader.

~ form a unified didactic team that collectively initiates others into its training and other activities.

~ embody amongst its members a living archive of songs and dances from different regions of India and the world.

~ seek its own type of spectator (sahrdaya) who is touched not merely cerebrally but simultaneously in the heart and gut. GLEN 100 N92

~ connect the worlds of stage and daily life through the performer's sadhana.



FIRST YEAR OF THE TRUST

MAY 1997 ~ MAY 1998

I have for a long time maintained that for the kind of theatre work I do the ~~only~~ essential (apart from the actor of course!) is a workspace. The workspace, however, needs to be a special place: not only practical (in the sense of flooring, ventilation, etc.) and inspiring (stimulating to the senses) but also protected. The latter, which is seldom properly understood, is the most important aspect.

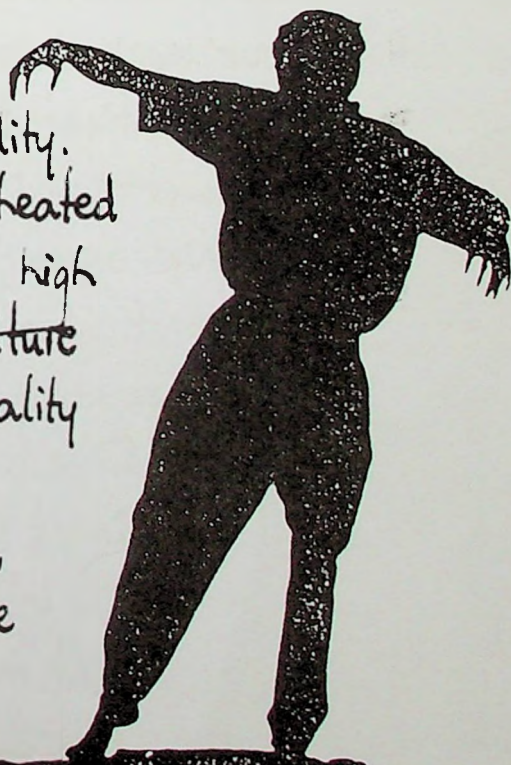
In the period of training and preparation: before the actor meets an audience through the prepared structure of a performance, or through the structure prepared for improvisation, she or he needs (perhaps ironically) to be protected from spectators ~ from prying eyes, intrusion, mockery, lack of comprehension,



or even mere viewing (as opposed to doing). The space has to be such that the actor can explore areas outside the bounds of convention, personal habit, what is known, in complete security amidst or together with colleagues involved in the same process.

Of course it is possible to find a way of working almost anywhere. I have conducted workshops on innumerable lawns and terraces, in parks, schoolrooms, sheds, a traffic round! However, I am talking about what is really needed so that one doesn't have to adapt to anything. Last year I wrote the following:

'The theatre workspace is a sacred space that one enters with humility and expectation, for once one is in it anything can happen. It is an extra-ordinary space where extra-ordinary events take place, set apart from ordinary everyday reality. The theatre space is a heated up place where there is high generation and expenditure of energy. The lived reality may be fictional, imaginative, mythical, historical, or simply the heightened present.'



Normal reality is suspended, superseded; actors become gods, demons, heroes, ancestors; they change sex, age, relationship, physical form, voice, garb, everything. The space itself is anywhere. It is a neutral but nurturing womb of happening.

Given the need for a space for the envisioned company, Ann (in her capacity as Administrative Director of the Trust) and I spent much effort over several months trying to identify and acquire a suitable property about 100km. distant from Bangalore (in order to have access to the metropolis and yet be free of its tentacles; to experience man's agricultural mode of cooperation with nature rather than industrial intervention). We found three possibilities, one of which was very good. Ann, along with our legal advisor, Rupert Rosario, investigated documents of ownership, land records, etc. and found that there was an unfortunate hitch in each particular case which made purchase impossible.

Due to these difficulties and the imminent prospect of group 'idea' turning into reality I decided to invest my financial resources (earned from a film, 'Hanuman',

to be released in Paris in October this year) in a van rather than on land. This would give us the mobility to work in different locations in lieu of a permanent work base. The van has already proved to be a great boon in the cheerful and capable hands of Venkatesh, our driver.

For several years two former students of the National School of Drama in Delhi (where I had taught them) A d i l H u s s a i n and R i t u T a l w a r had been expressing their wish to work with me in a group.

Since both were involved with other projects till the end of the year, and I wanted to start group activity together with them, I decided to focus during the interim



period on creating a new solo performance.

For about a year and a half I have felt a performance taking shape within me. I could not find words

to formulate even a sentence about what it might be but could feel it growing!

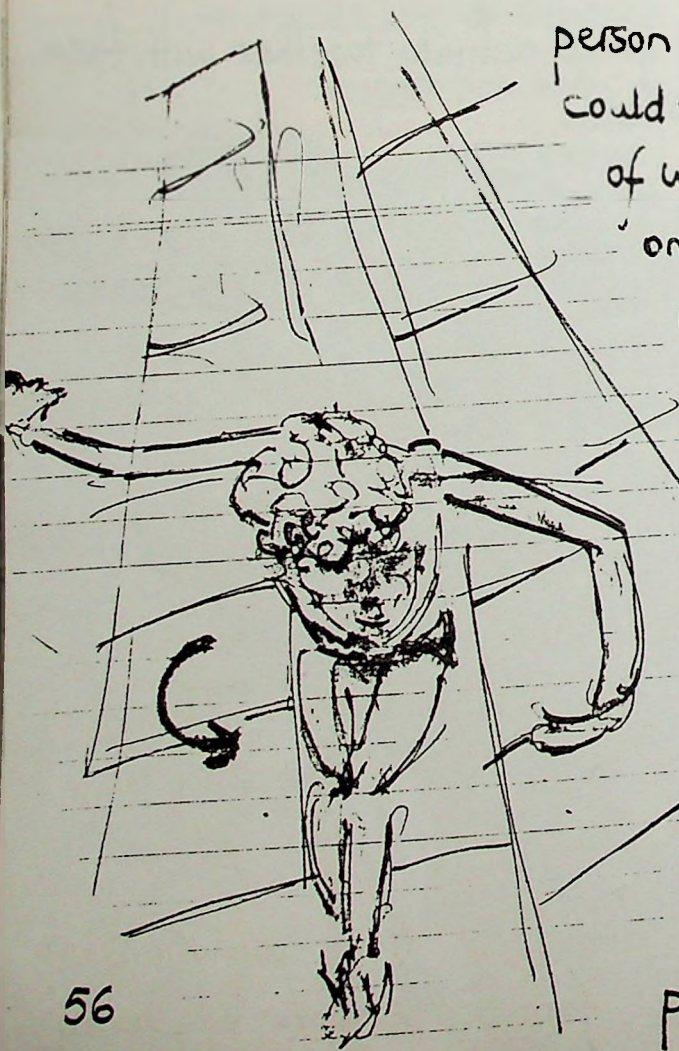
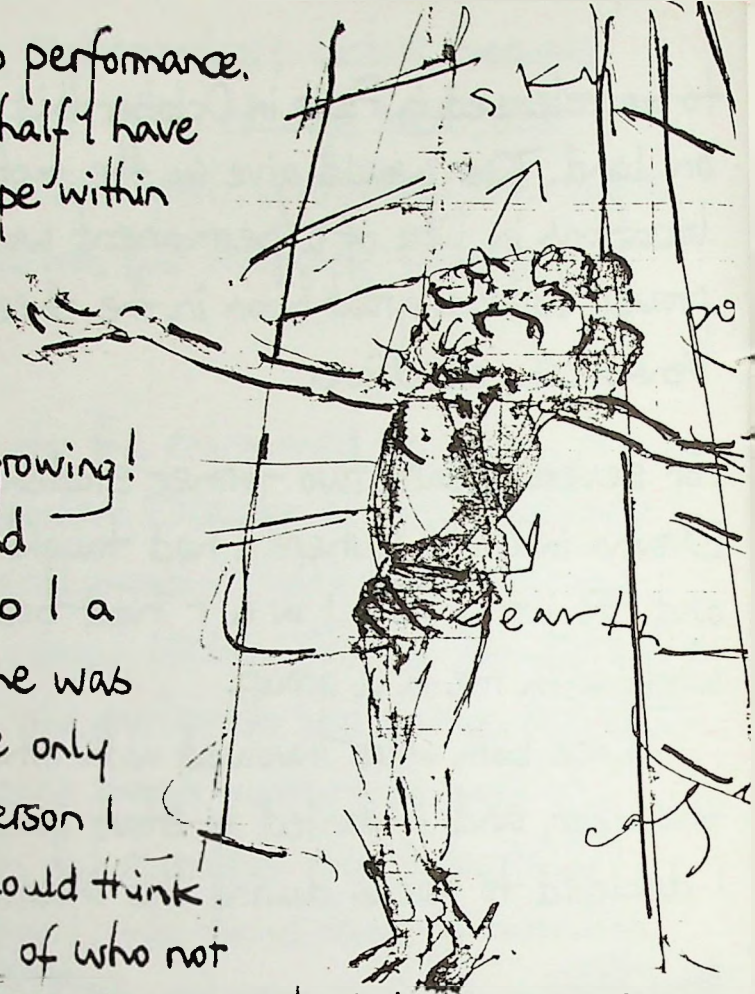
I wrote to my old friend and collaborator in Poland, Jola Cynkutis, since she was

the only person I could think of who not

only understood that a performance may be 'born' out of silence, out of work in the space, but also had the capacity to be midwife to the process.

Work on solo performance fits with my conception of the ensemble, envisioned

as comprising a repertoire of performances ranging from solo



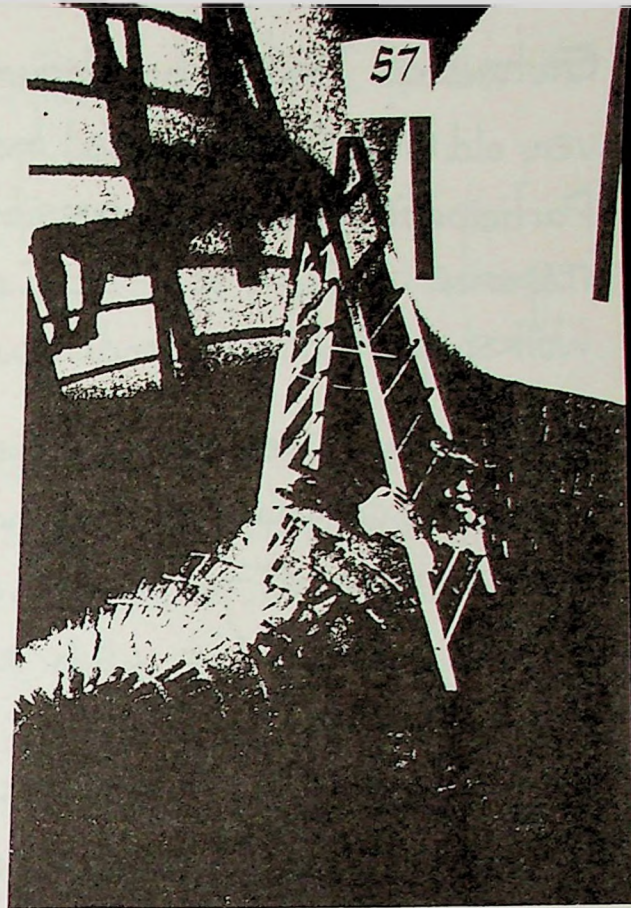
efforts to those involving the whole group. In this way all my solo performances will find their place in the group archive.

During a trip to Poland in July and parts of August 1997 I worked with Jola in Poznań on evolving the physical score for what has since become:
In Search of Monér Manush.

While in Poland I was chosen, along with Jola and Tom Randolph, to be one of the Artistic Directors of a European Union project entitled Quo Vadis Europe? This was organized by the Wierzbak Foundation in Poznań under the management of Bogdan and Grażyna Wąsiel.

An eight-day residential workshop ensued in a medieval castle in Łagów, Poland. The participants were from Poland, Germany, and Belgium — young students in their teens grappling with ideas of national identity and a united Europe. ~~Result:~~ structured street actions on the general theme in the town squares of Poznań, Kassel, and Hamme.

In London, en route to India, I attended a five-day workshop with Zygmunt Molik, former member of Jerzy



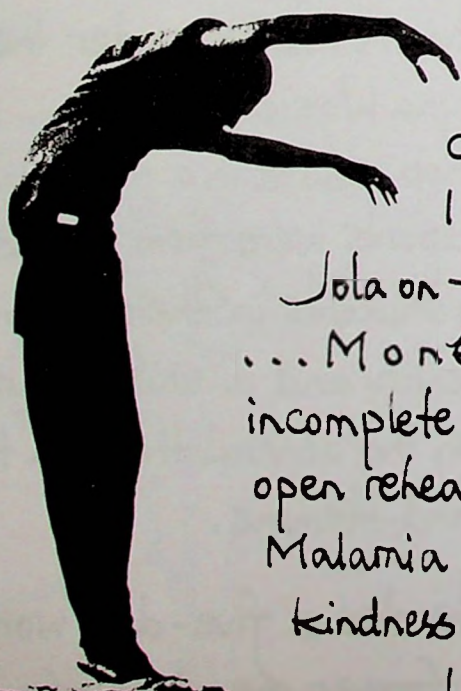
Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium. This was the realization of a very old wish that confirmed many of my ideas in practice.

Participation was made possible by the instant and very warm response of Dick McCaw (Director of the International Workshop Festival in London) who offered me a full bursary.

While in India between late September and early November I worked on compiling textual material (from diverse authors) that corresponded for me with the rough physical score of ... Monér Manush as it had developed in collaboration with Jola up to that point.

I also taught a two-week course at the National School of Drama in Delhi with Adil Hussain as assistant. Two more students expressed the wish to join me, should I form a group, after their graduation in summer 1988.

During my second stint in Poland, in November and December, I composed a text out of the material I had compiled and worked with Jola on fusing it with the physical score of ... Monér Manush. This work is still incomplete. Before leaving Poznań I did three open rehearsals for interested friends in the Malarz of the Teatr Polski. Due to the kindness of the then director, Lech Raczak, I had the good fortune to also be



able to rehearse at this theatre. Lights were lent us for the 59 whole period by the Teatr Ósmego Dnia.

I taught two classes with Jola to drama students of the Academy of Visual Arts while in Poznań, working on performance.

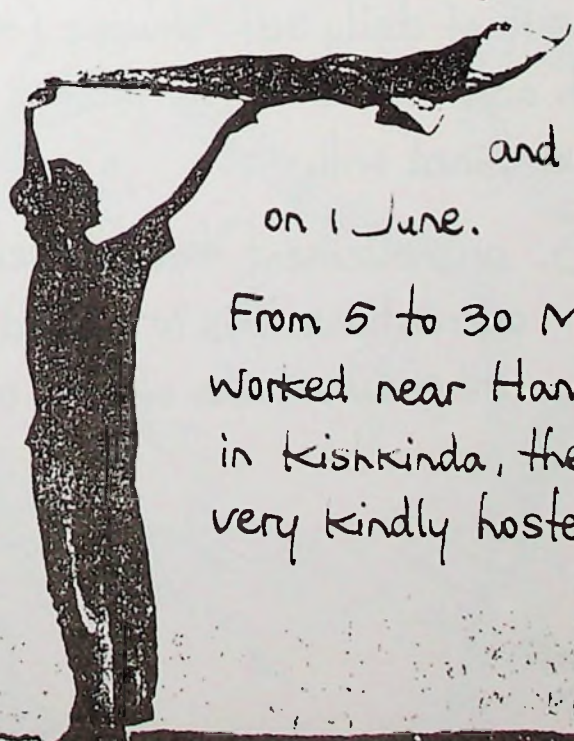
In India again and working towards a group, I conducted two selection workshops open to participants from all over the country between 27 January and 1 March.

These were held at Visthar, in Doddagubbi near Bangalore due to the kind help of Mercy Kappen and David Selvaraj.

In the first I was assisted very ably and conscientiously by Ritu Tulwar; in the second by her and Adil Hussain, just back from Amsterdam.

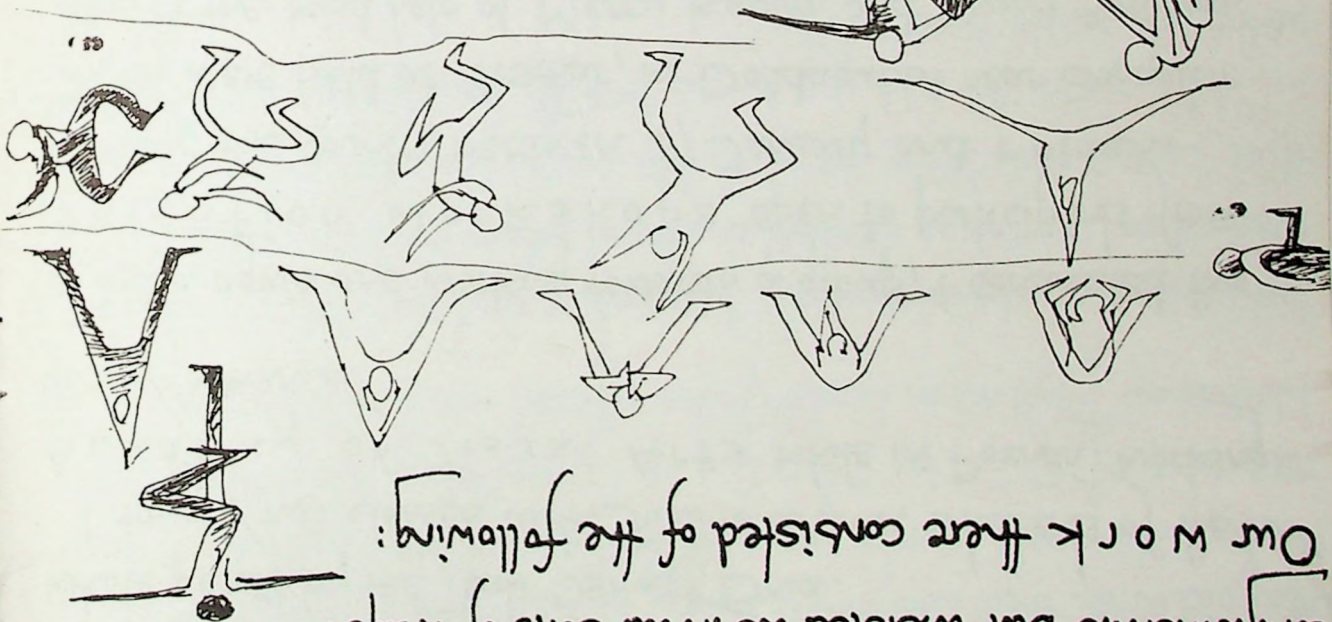
These workshops resulted in the formation of a company of nine members (including Adil, Ritu, and me) with a tenth to join on 1 June.

From 5 to 30 March the company worked near Hanumanhalli and Anegundi in Kishkinda, the Hampi area. We were very kindly hosted by my friends Shama



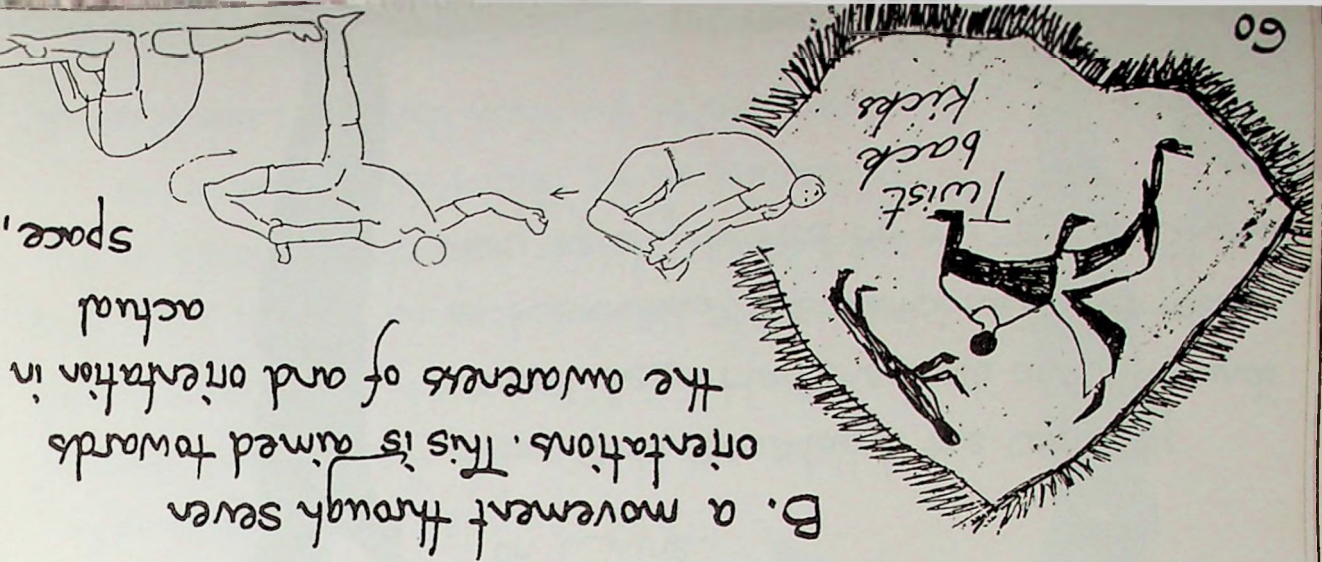
and Adam Shapiro who not only put up with our idiosyncratic conglomerate but assisted us in all sorts of ways.

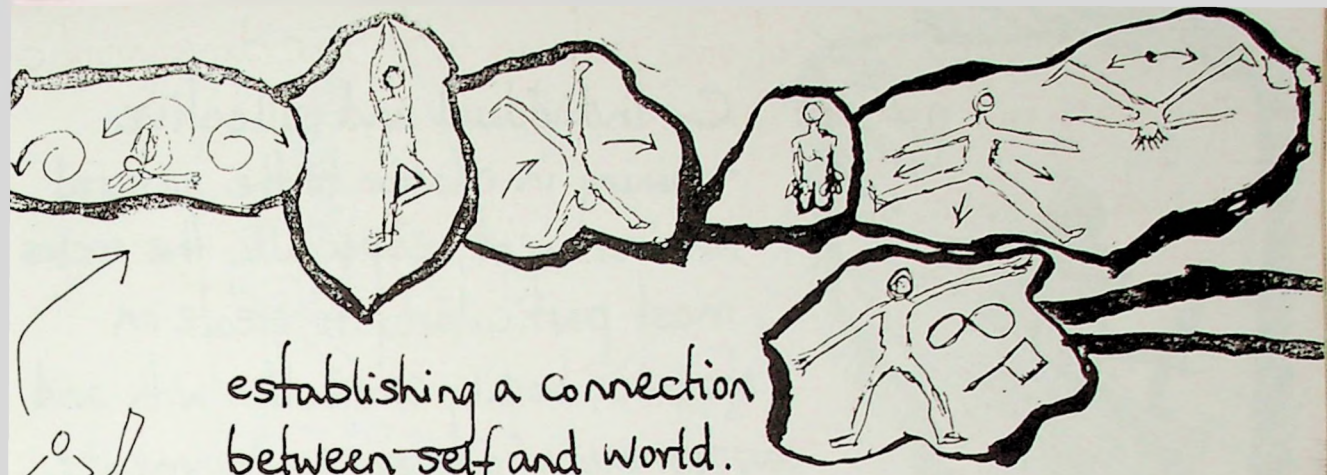
Our work there consisted of the following:



A. The creation and evolution of a personal regimen of physical training by each actor; a regimen of personal exercises, abanas, dance choreography, element of performance that is a site of daily self-struggle (Tapas towards self-mastery) for each actor at her or his present stage of development. This is combined with:

B. a movement through seven orientations. This is aimed towards the awareness of and orientation in actual space,

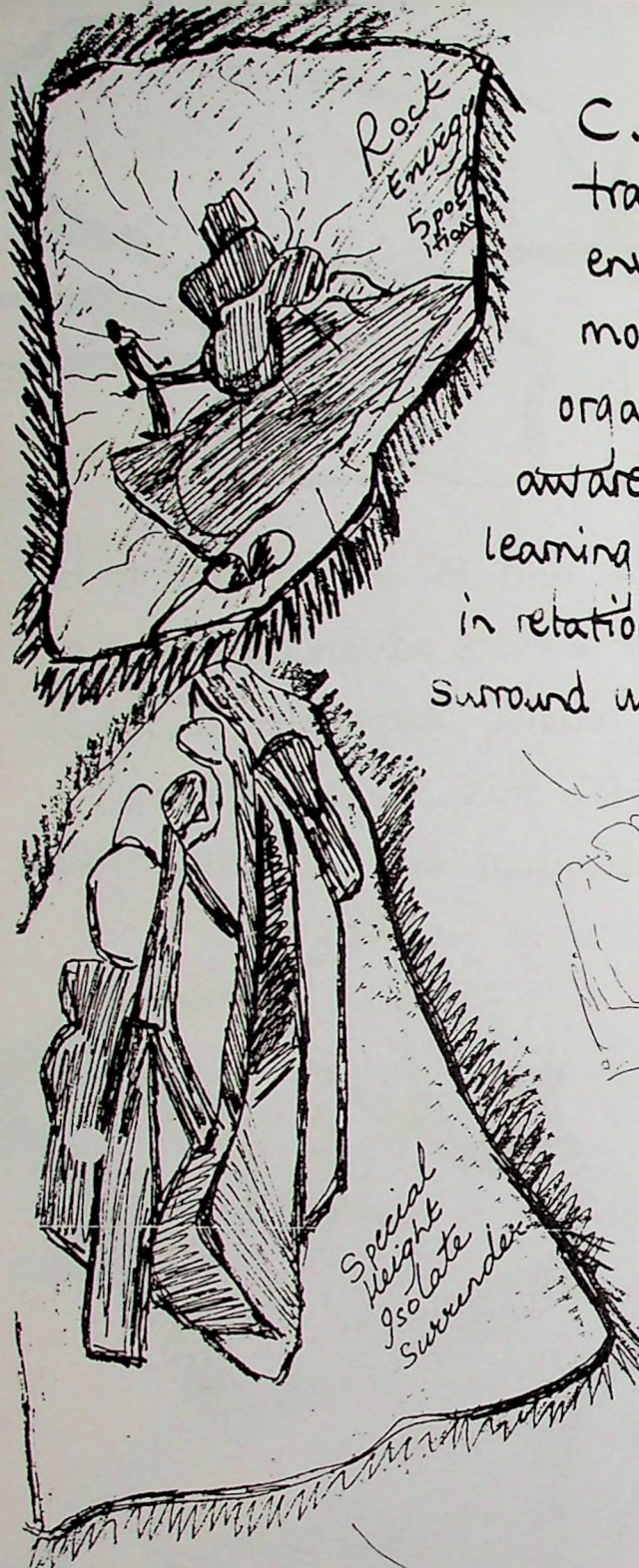




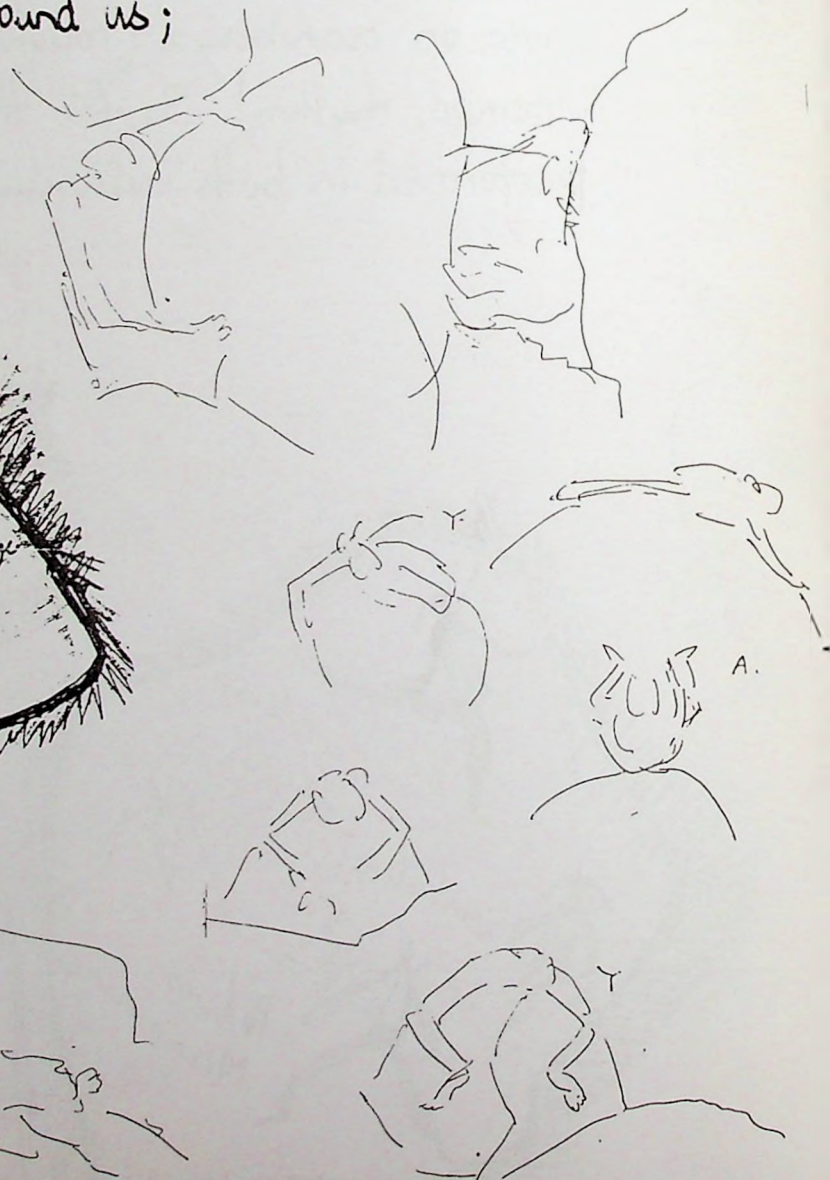
establishing a connection
between self and world.

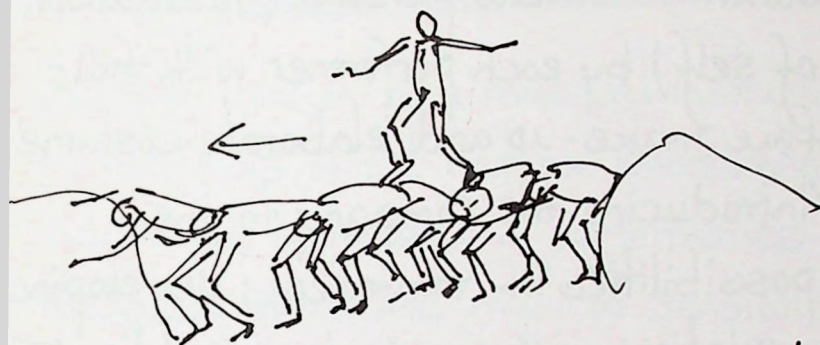
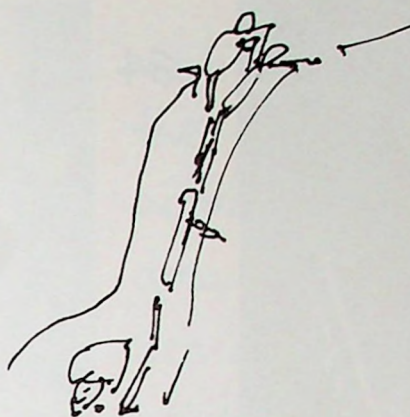
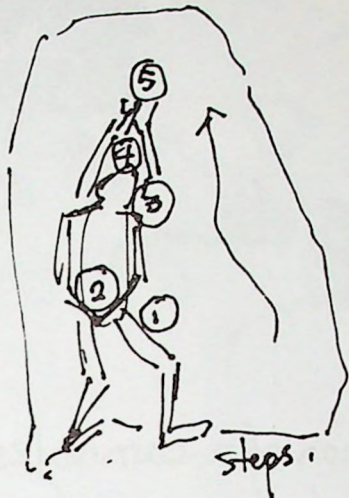
The complete cycle of A. and B. is intended to be
used as a vehicle for a more advanced stage of
work on abhinaya (roughly, expression) and laya
(tempo, rhythm). So far this score has been
performed in both individual and collective spaces.



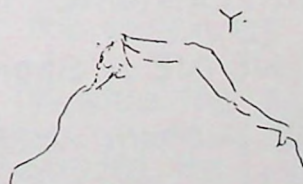


C. Individual and collective training in relation to the natural environment, especially the rocks most particularly to create an organic, bodily connection with and awareness of a given environment; learning to take in, feed off, and act in relation to whatever it is that may surround us;





D. Ensemble work on physical cooperation; beginnings towards creating a group organism; towards arriving at a bodily understanding of one another.

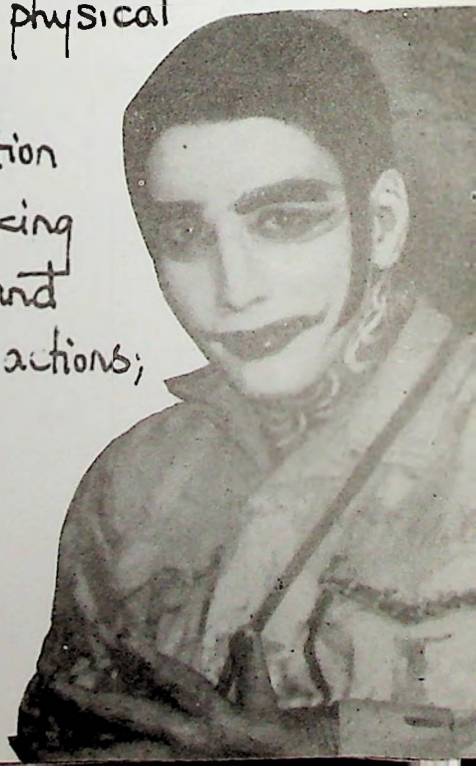




E. The creation of a carnivalesque clown — mela persona (incarnation of self) by each performer with full-face make-up and elaborate costume; introducing the company to the possibilities of tomfoolery; developing

individual and collective relations with people in a public theatrical mode; used in acts of greeting, sweeping (see below), celebrating Holi and Ugadi;

F. Actions in service of the social and physical environment: (1) replanting pots on the Tungabhadra riverbank for the irrigation of saplings — without costume, making use of the fact that we are a strong and efficient team who can perform useful actions; (2) an action based on playfully trying to provoke the inhabitants of Anegundi village to sweep and clean its public space on the occasion of Ugadi (New Year, when all homes are





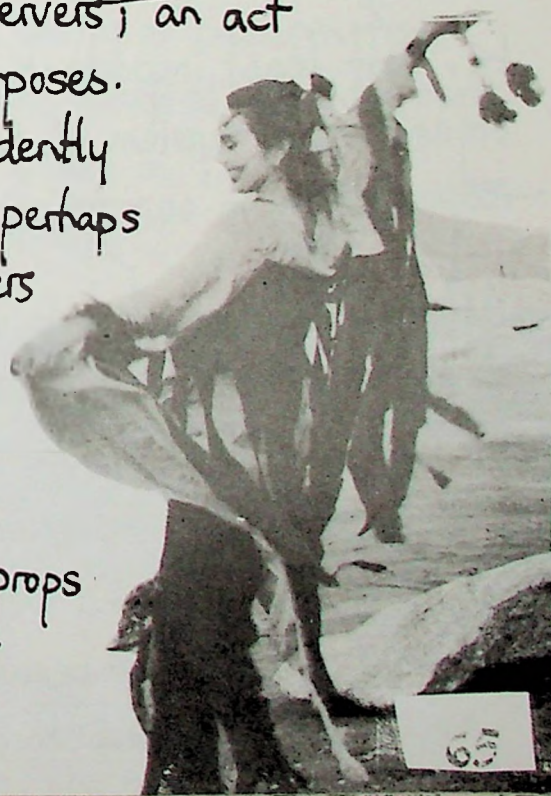
meticulously cleaned); the first occasion for the actualization of an old dream of provoking 'self-service' (acts of public utility) and writing this with the 'artistic'.

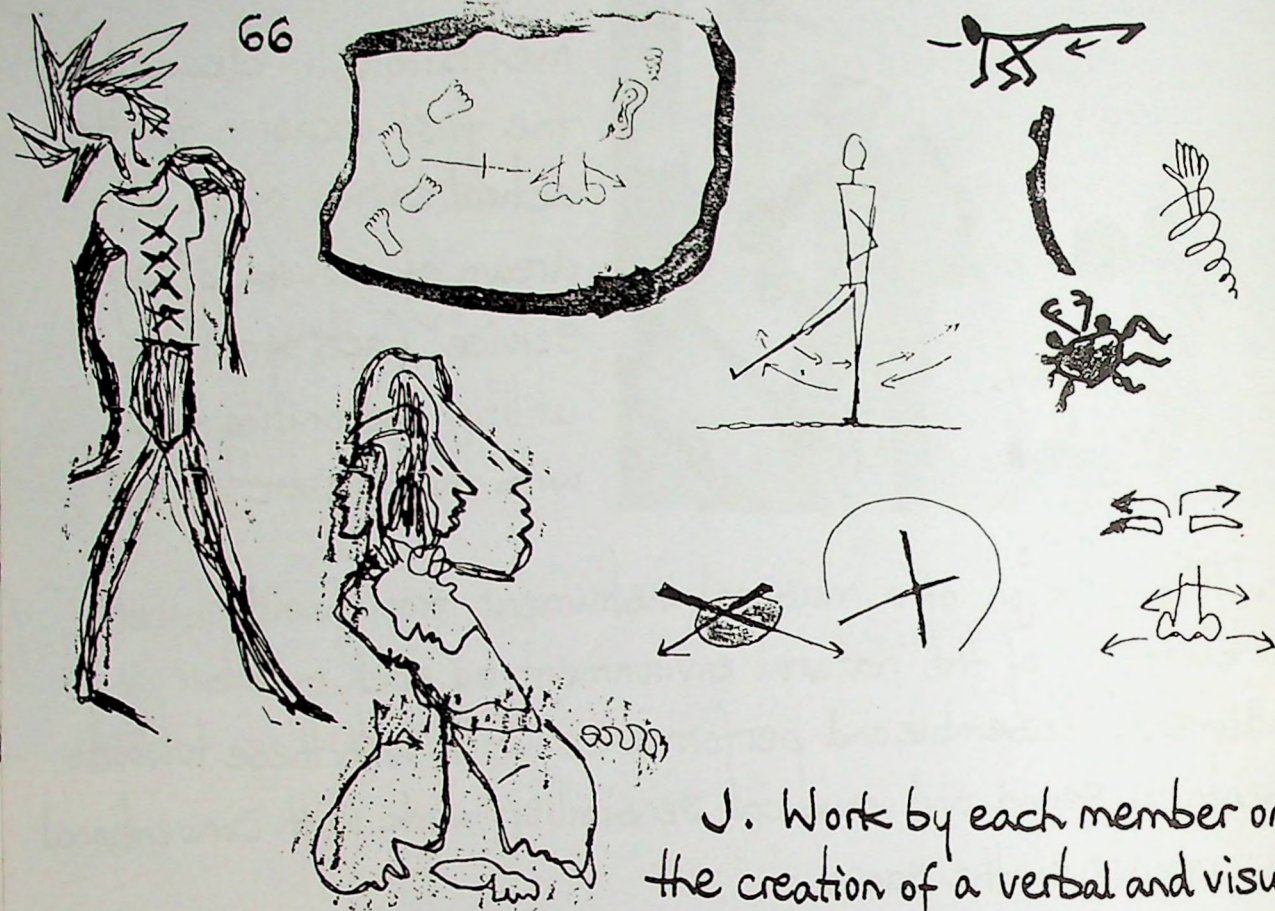
G. The creation of a musical instrument from found objects or elements of the natural environment by each member; individual, ensemble, and performance work with these towards theatrical sound and musical sensibility; work with conventional instruments on the same.

H. Two attempts towards developing what might be called 'open training': open to interested observers; an act that may be used for pedagogical purposes.

On both occasions the group was evidently inhibited and 'conscious' despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that the observers were friends, sympathetic towards the work; this clearly demonstrated the difficulty and delicacy of this matter.

I. Small beginnings in the use of props and elements of costume as tools for theatre.





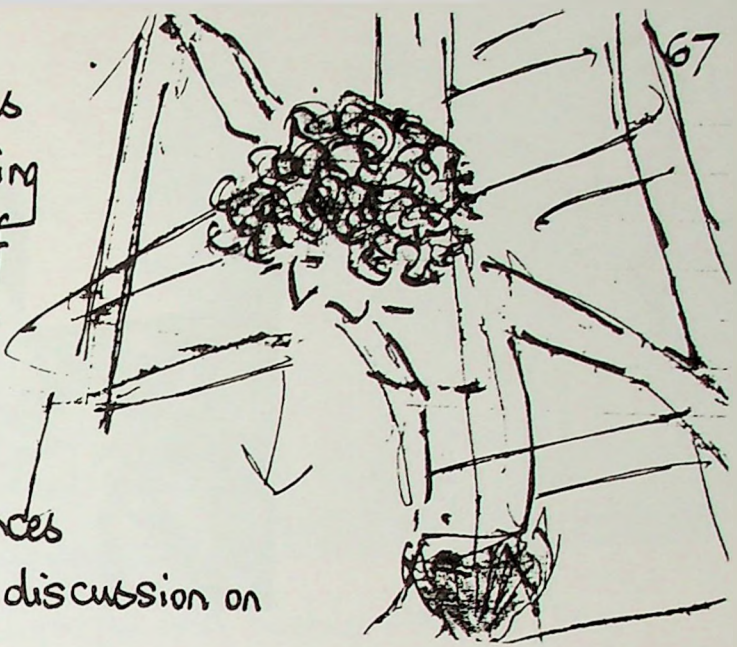
J. Work by each member on the creation of a verbal and visual means of notation by way of which work of an essentially non-verbal nature may be recorded.

K. Not least important, finding a way of being together, organizing a system of kitchen and cooking, taking up areas of responsibility in our functioning as a theatre group...

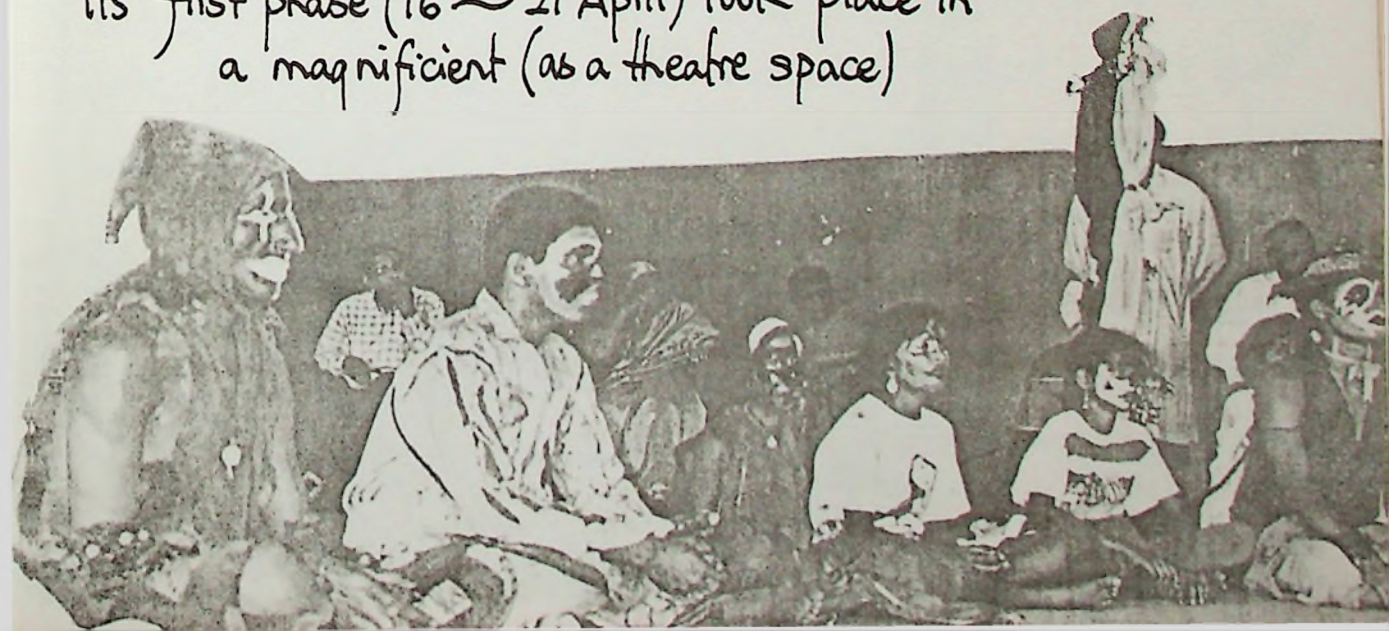
After a few days' break the company gathered at Mahesh Dattani's newly built studio theatre in Bangalore where, as he put it, we were the first 'artists in residence', indeed the first occupants of the building.

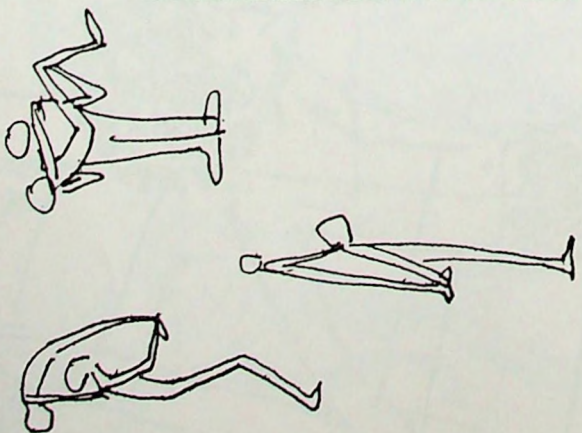
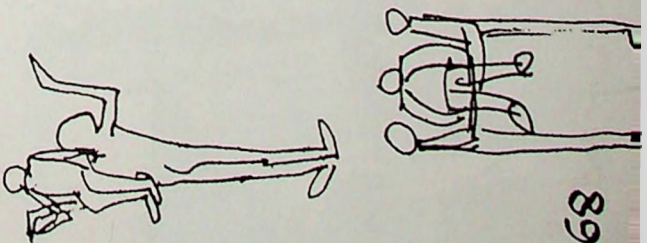
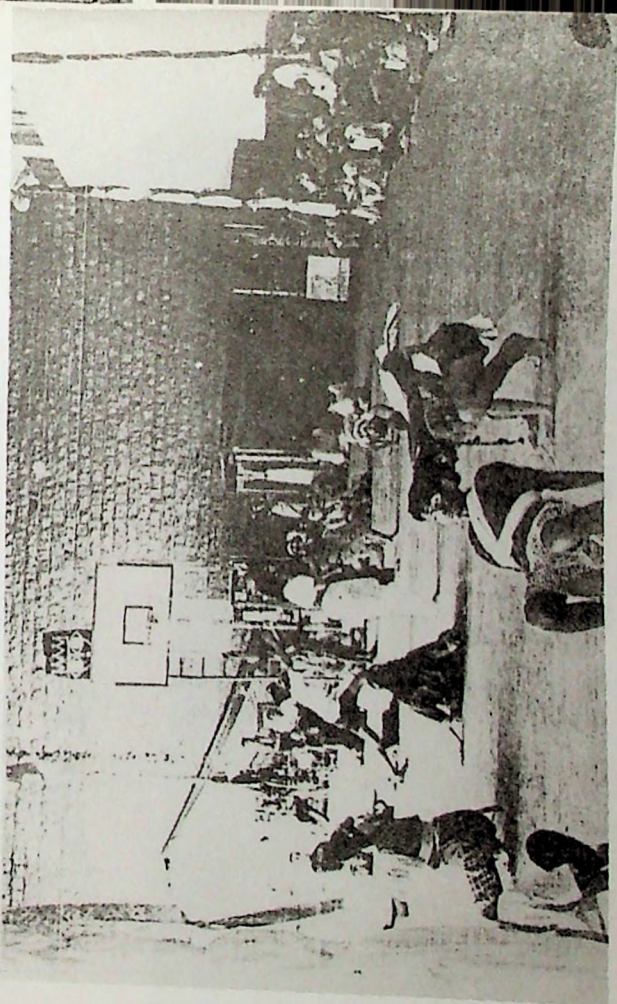
The group continued with the practice of the individual cycles of elements and also began to attempt the role of being 'outside eyes' while I worked on... Moner Manush.

The ensemble worked truly as one preparing for and organizing the first public 'previews' of *In Search of Moner Manush* on 10, 11, and 12 April with which the Studio was inaugurated. These performances were followed by an open discussion on the morning of the 13th.



On 16 April, with the company in the role of clown-assistants, I began a workshop for children. This was organized by ~~Kadambari~~, headed by Mrs Chandra Jain in collaboration with Mr Balakrishna Hegde of the Premanjali Trust. The 28 participants ranging from the ages of 10 to 14 consisted partly of ~~Kadambari~~ workshop 'regulars' and partly of children from Premanjali orphanage. Our workshop was divided into three parts. Its' first phase (16 ~ 21 April) took place in a magnificent (as a theatre space)





half-built auditorium in Bangalore. The principal challenge during this week, apart from introducing the children to our world of theatre, was the integration of the two groups.

Then (22 ~ 28 April) we continued in Melkote where, on the final day, the participants enacted some delightful and highly skilled (in dramaturgy) bird-stories of their own creation.

The concluding three days (1 ~ 3 May) of the workshop took place again in Bangalore. We created, in collaboration with the children, a final celebratory event and valediction. This was built out of some of the many elements that had made up our experience during this time.

Our workshop on some elements of theatre practice was combined at the last moment with one on 'traditional lifestyle'. Many diverse people had sessions on dimensions of the latter. This led to a rather unfortunate 'kuchidi'. The best aspect was seeing the two groups of children, privileged and underprivileged, freely playing with each other during breaks and parting with an appreciation of each unique individuality.

4 ~ 21 May was spent in Bangalore, engaged in various types of individual preparation: work on texts, costumes, instruments, training, and performance propositions. We were very fortunate to be allowed to live in a friend,



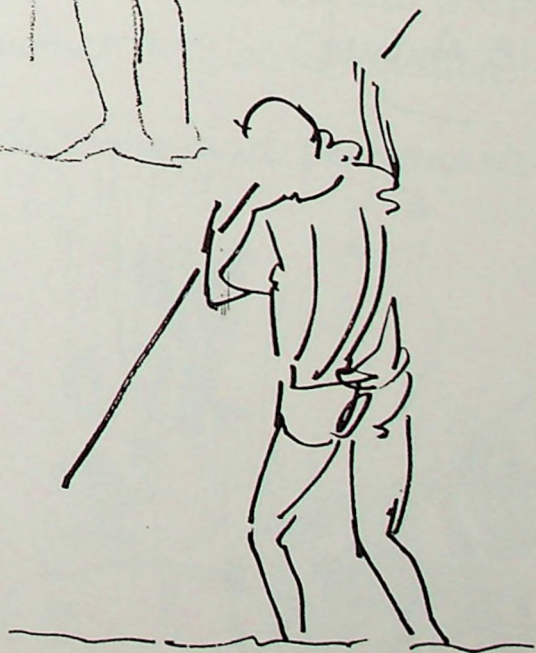
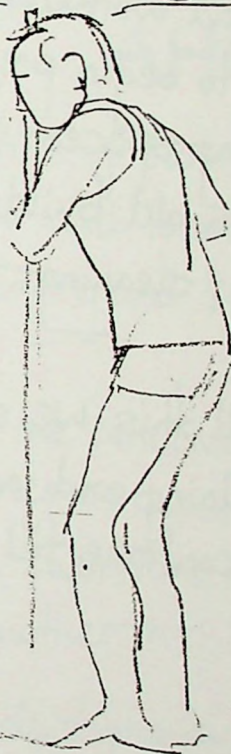
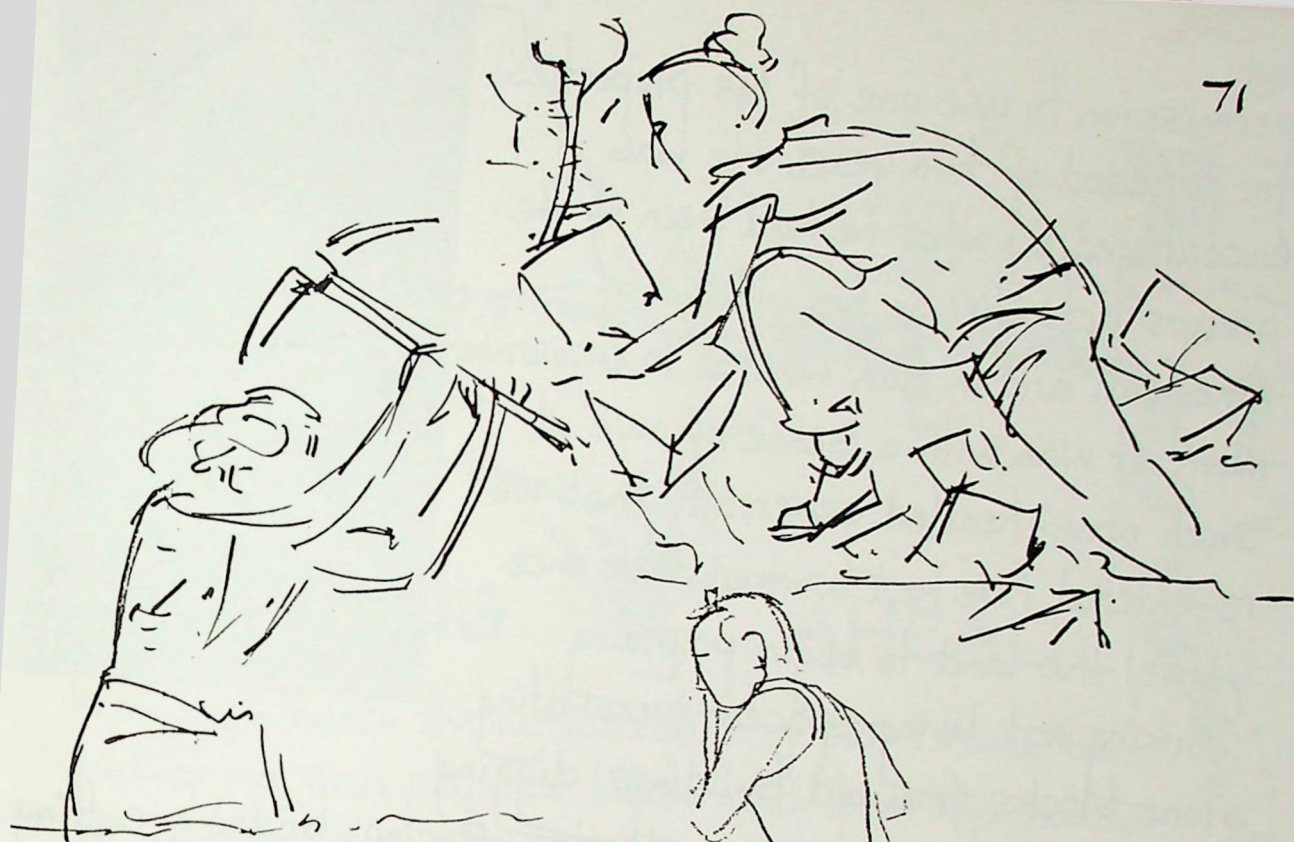
Hema Choksi's home while she was away and to use a classroom at Maria Niketan School as a workspace. The latter was arranged for us through the kind effort of another ally, Duarte Barreto.

Between the 8th and the 13th I worked with a Sri Lankan actor, Soumaratne Malimbada, who had arrived in Bangalore from Delhi hoping to join our group. Since we were 'House Full' and I was very short of time I decided to work with him 'guerilla fashion' and try to get him to create a solo performance in six days. If he could do this he would be able to stand on his own feet and do theatre even if alone. He worked manically hard and moved us all considerably with his 'open rehearsal' on the 13th, just prior to his return.

On 22 May we returned to Hanumanhalli, once more as Shama's guests.

During the interim period, since our first visit, Sri Ram Devaraya (descendent of the Krishna Devaraya lineage) had agreed to my request for



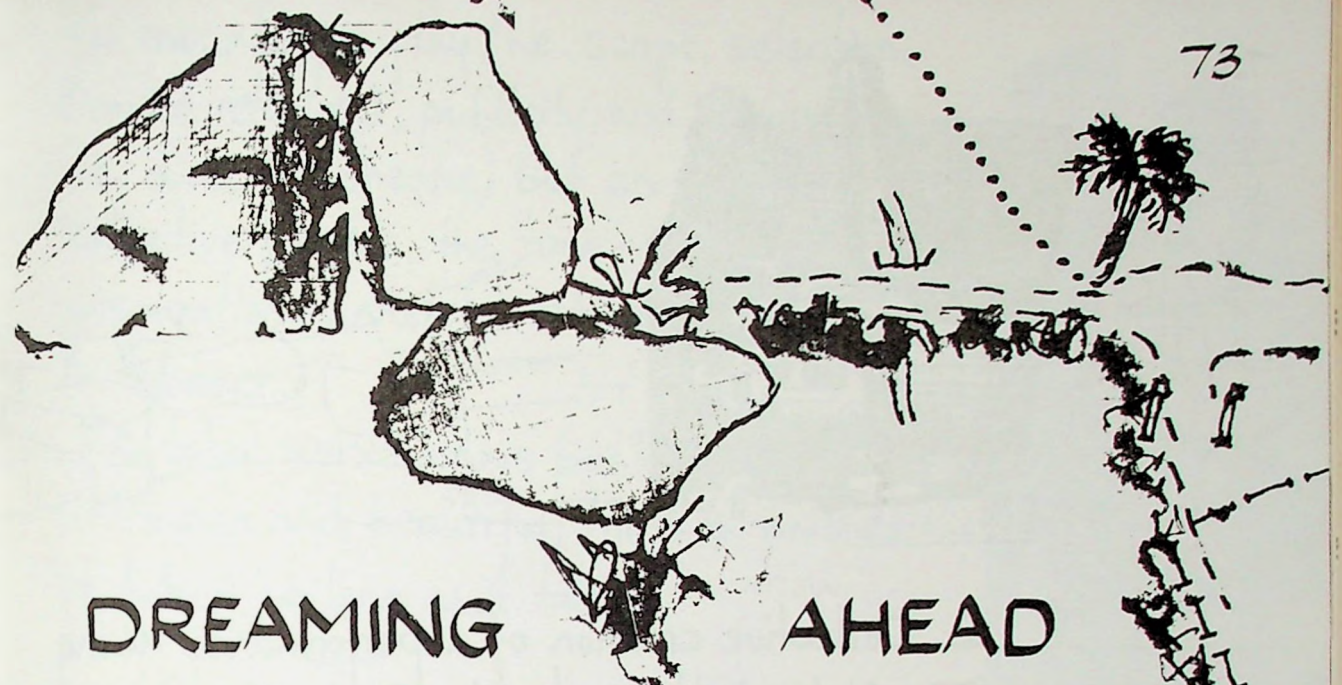


permission to use one of his properties for a period of two years. He was encouraged by what he had seen of the group's activities in his village of Aneundi and in turn wanted to encourage them. It was with a sense of awe at such open-hearted generosity that we re-entered (we had worked there once before) the land to begin preparing working and living spaces: excavating stone blocks from old buildings, digging canals, planting, clearing, clearing, fencing, bridging, culting, building.



In between all this we still try to keep alive the thread of personal training and individual performance propositions. This work will continue till 25 June when we break till 13 August.



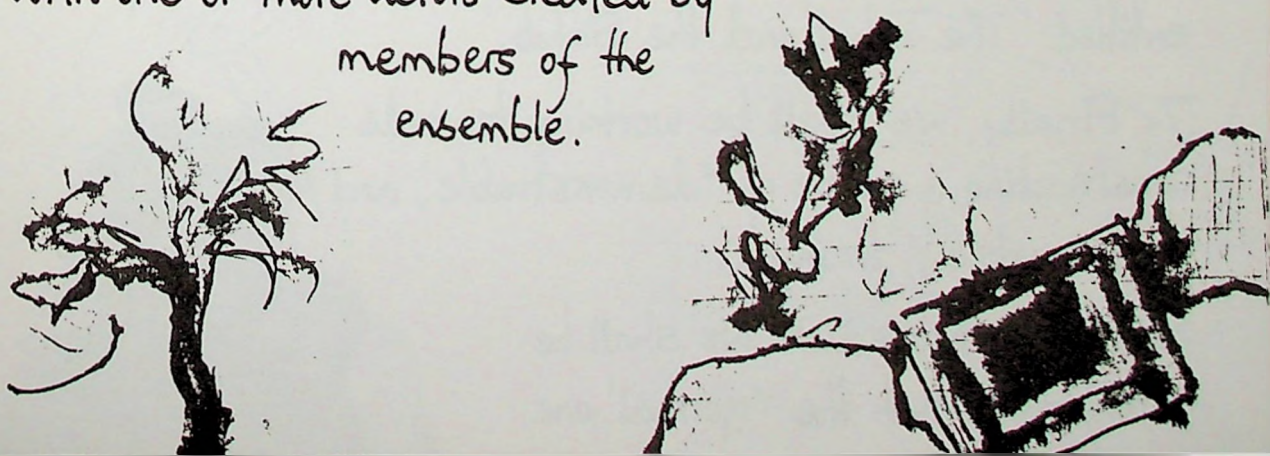


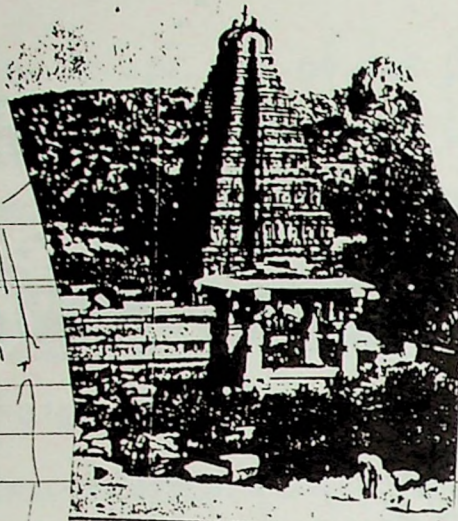
DREAMING AHEAD

Working towards the actualization of our dreams by dint of our own physical labour and local assistance we hope to establish initial working and living spaces by mid-August.

After that we shall parallel the construction of buildings and spaces with the simultaneous construction of performances. We expect to be swimming in several streams that will weave through one another in playful relation:

1. 'Bits and Pieces': solo productions and performances with one or more actors created by members of the ensemble.





2. Collective creation of a performance using 'The Alchemist', a story by Paulo Coelho, as springboard.

3. Collective version of Foolsong.

4. Collective version of a participatory event for children and adults based on Foolshow.

5. Street Actions: Continuing the collective and individual tomfoolery launched in March.

6. A 'Dinner Show' involving theatre and the act of eating, in conjunction with a performance on social relations, possibly entitled 'The Tribal and the Sahib.'

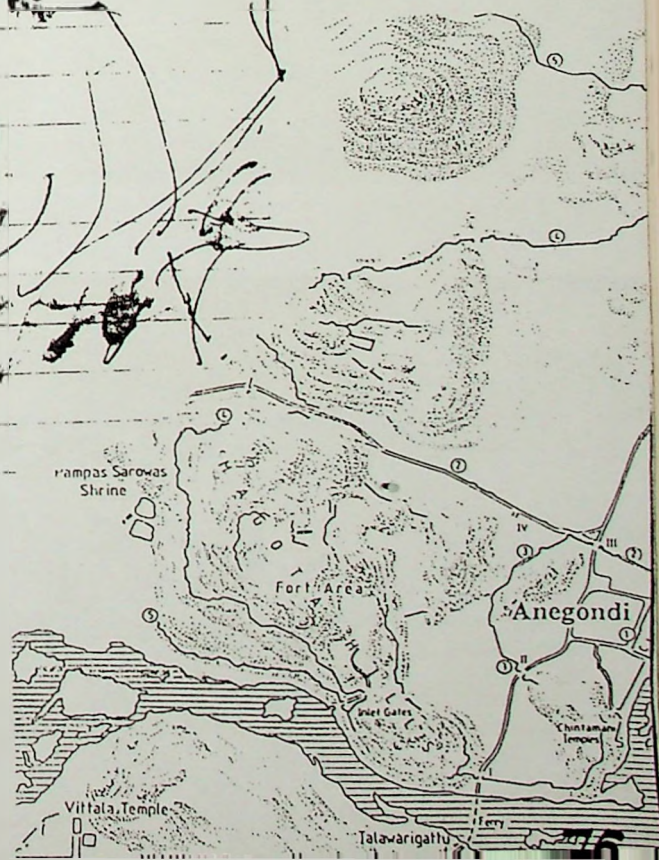
7. Finally, we shall be working towards constructing a piece of 'demonstrable', and 'performable', training.

Since the procedure we shall be following is not the 'normal' one



for mounting a play (i.e. script, selection, limited rehearsal, publicity, and performance, i.e. directors' theatre) but an organic, collective process, the time-frame for preparation cannot be estimated or fixed in advance.

A tribal works on his basket, both utilitarian and beautiful, till it is finished. It takes as long as it takes.







MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY ~



'the whole group at this point seems to be composed of highly individual personalities... the binding force (I think) is that our approaches to our work and what we want to do are quite similar.

We seem, on one level or the other, to be driven by the same forces, dreams and desires. We thrill to the same kinds of performance, texts, songs, and dances. We are in tune as much as a new orchestra that might take it upon itself to compose a piece of music rather than play a classic...'

DEESH MARIWALA.

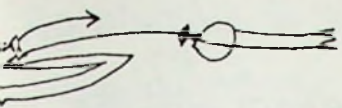
ADIL HUSSAIN b. 1965

'my major activity as a performer was "stand up comedy" ~ I worked for six years and performed at least 150 times during two months of every year.

Sometimes we did nine 45 min ~ 1 hour shows in one night, from dusk to dawn..'

78 'Dhrubajit Kishore Chaudhury (Bhaya





Mama), leader of our 79
group, made me realize
the dynamic equation

between actor and audience... he helped me experience warm human contact during our performances... to realize that a performance is not just to earn money and fame... to perform 'without remuneration...'

'a verbal, satirical expression of socio-political order or disorder...'

~ Has very wide performing experience, particularly in Assam; has acted in 'stage-plays', radio plays, street performances, dance, television, film, and as percussionist in musical performances.

"I wanted to perform all over India, all over the world..."

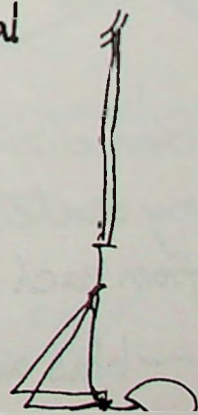
~ Studied at the National School of Drama in Delhi and (having received the Festival of India award) at the Drama Studio, London;

~ has directed television plays and worked in several film productions as assistant director and production controller;

~ has been an actor touring with the National School of Drama Repertory Company (Delhi based) and with a professional mobile theatre company in Assam, the Hengul Theatre, doing 250 shows in 7 months!

~ has conducted numerous workshops in different parts of India and in Amsterdam;

~ performed as a clown in the International Tourism



Festival in Utrecht;

80

~ his last assignment was in the role of Sutradhara with the Het Internationaal Dance Theatre, Amsterdam, in a production entitled 'Mother India'; he performed 52 times with the company all over Holland.



RITU TALWAR b. 1970



~ Travelled widely as a child;

'vanishing from home... returning with my dress full of butterflies...'

'raising my hands quite a lot about participating in theatrical fare...'

~ B.A. in English at Indraprastha College, Delhi;

'wonderful teachers supported our right to turn our lecture halls into settings...'

'Enthusiasm and the Dramatics Society invited Prabha Tonk to direct... acting with 5 women under a warm and generous personality was an introduction to what lay ahead...'



~ Studied at the National School of Drama, Delhi:

'it would be very difficult to come to certain realizations and to actively begin the process of channelizing them into a concrete graph of study and action without my teachers... Nibha Joshi, Robin Das, Raghunandan, B. Ratna... from each one, one continues to learn...'

~ Was awarded the Charles Wallace India Trust



Scholarship to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

'Patsy Rodenburg and Kenneth Rea as Guides confirmed that I needed to rethink...'

'realizing that a woman performer's liabilities, conduct, utterances, forms, was teaching me to find stories, narratives, and a balance within myself to move away from popular constructed images or my own insecurity in being swamped by uniform ways of being...'

~ has acted in several productions by different directors; most memorable has been working with Anamika Haksar and Roysten Marks Abel;

~ has conducted workshops with children and adults in India and Sri Lanka, written a television script and acted in a documentary.

'a hiccup start led me to alternate performing innovations: cleaning homes, making my crayon cards visible, cooking, writing about other peoples' dream projects, deweeding gardens to earn...'

~ has been guest actress in the National School of Drama Repertory Company in Delhi; has written, directed and performed two shows on the Mandal Commission issue in Delhi.

'Now... there's lots of work ahead... as one bold, threatening advertisement for shoes says "just do it" ...'



81



DEESH MARIWALA b. 1972

'then I discovered other writers... and my life and my thinking were changed forever. I now dared to dream.'



~ Did his first professional play when he was 15; has acted in a number of English-language productions in Bombay and Madras since then with the British Council Players, the Madras Players, the Boardwalkers, Pauline Hahn, Ranvir Shah, R. Ramanathan, Toni Patel, Vikram Kapadia, Sylvester Da Cunha; apart from acting he has directed several plays, conducted workshops, dealt with production, music, and lighting.

'I always knew the wishes of my heart, acting in a play when I was five...'

'Studying science in school, training to be a physicist and mathematician after my father, realizing every moment that I wanted more than anything to be on stage...'



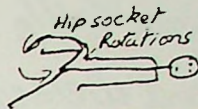
'"You'll starve to death"; "You can't make a living out of theatre"; "actors are nobodies"; "Everybody does it in the evenings" were the refrains I was bombarded with...'

~ Applied for the National School of Drama but no students were taken that year; trained for the merchant navy instead.



'the merchant navy bored me to death in two years so

I turned to advertising. Starting as a copywriter, I moved on to corporate films and then to commercials...



~ Has been copywriter in Profad, Madras;

~ has worked in numerous roles in the television and film industries: as Creative Consultant,



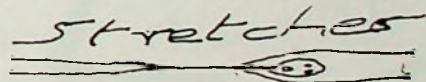
Associate Director (with Kundan Shah), Casting Director, Executive Producer, Technical Consultant, Production Coordinator, Producer, Writer, Editor, Evaluator and Director; was India's youngest Chief Executive.

'in the evenings I continued to do theatre as a saive for my soul...'

~ Acted in Mari Ratnam's film, Bombay, and recently in a Kannada film;

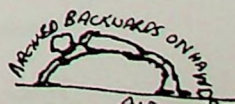
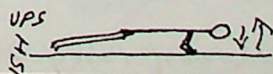
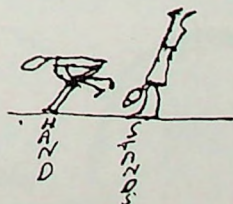
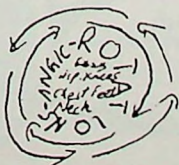
~ interested in reading, weapons, music. Certified firefighter; rock climber; motorcycle racer.

'dreams were rekindled...'



'Knowing that life, and the theatre, are not simple. Just when you think you've got something kicked, life will stand you on your head and show you your shortcomings. I hope I continue to have the courage to face mine...'

Warming and relaxing
each muscle
returning to strength
SOME TRICKS
and bodybuilding



SHANTI DEVI UPPAL b. 1973

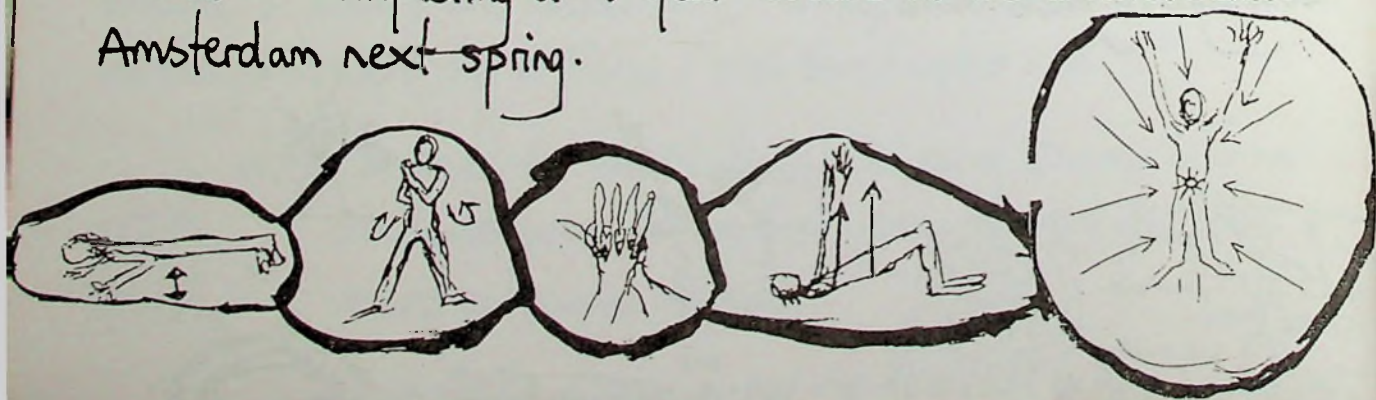
'when I was little Shanti I sang, danced, painted and dressed myself throughout the days and sometimes the nights...'

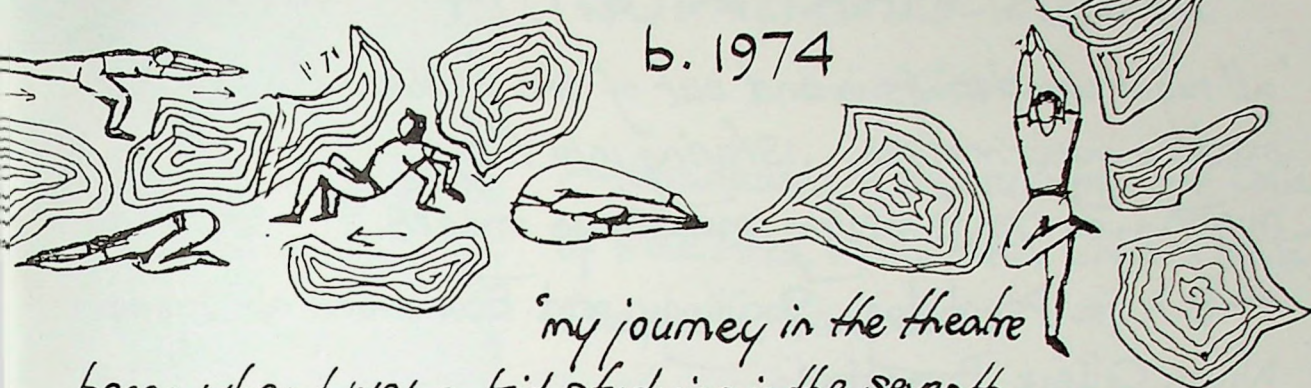
- ~ Born of Indian and Dutch parents, Shanti grew up between Holland and India;
- ~ has worked as an actress in the Amsterdam Theatre Company, in other productions, and in a television serial;
- ~ studied singing, percussion (including drumset and tabla); worked as musician, singer, songwriter, and composer; interested in contemporary music and experiment with sound.



'the musicians seemed to be so much more concrete than the people I met during the day at the theatre...'

- ~ Studied dance expression for four years with Elise Roosen; attended numerous theatre and acting courses; a course in sculpting at the College of Art in Delhi;
- ~ will be completing a 4 year course at the Drama School in Amsterdam next spring.





b. 1974

'my journey in the theatre began when I was a kid studying in the seventh standard... I performed my first drama... it was also my birthday...'

~ worked for many years studying theatre and performing under the direction of his uncle Murin Bor Gohain in Sibsagar, Assam;
 ~ trained in welding and repairs at the E.M.E. Army workshop.

'my parents wanted me to do something which is not related to theatre... I was in a puzzle... everything I was doing was related only to theatre...'

~ Studied the year-long acting course at the School of Drama in Guwahati;

~ worked as a professional actor on stage and television; as Assistant Director in the making of documentary films; has worked as director and scenic designer and participated in street theatre; former member of the New Art Players in Guwahati where he worked under Shambhu Gupta, Abha Hazarika, and Anoop Chakravarti.

'slowly, slowly theatre became my life...
 ... but I was never satisfied...'



NEHA SHARMA b. 1974

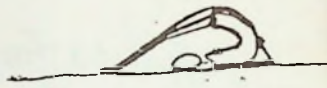


'all night wanderings in and out of the house making queer noises... Staring into the mirror... to create melting, monstrous images...'

~ B.A. in Psychology, Sociology, and Economics at Jyothi Nivas College, Bangalore;

~ played in Mاهش Dattani's 'Twinkle Tara' directed by him, and Prakash Belawadi's production of Vijay Palki's 'Credit Titles'.

'on stage I found myself sharp and alive...'



~ Course in mass-media at the Media Centre, Bangalore;

~ tried to be part of a theatre group before turning to film in Madras

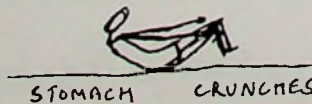
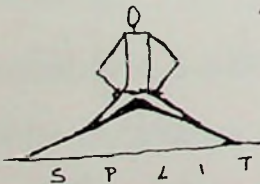
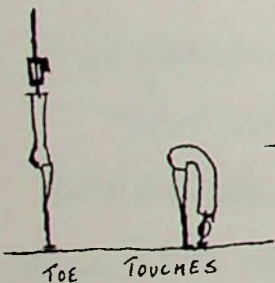
'the people surrounding the world of theatre... thought it was all about being seen and admired...'

'I vacillated between feeling that they were all stupid and the feeling that maybe I was very stupid...'

'faded into the background doing bit roles in serials...'

~ Has acted in television serials and recently in a Kannada film (with Deesh);

~ has been Assistant Director for a number of documentary films.





GOPAL BIJU KUMAR

b. 1974

~ Graduated in painting from the College of Fine Arts, Karnataka Chithra Kata Parishath, Bangalore.

'after graduating I was looking for some form which involved dance but not popular dancing...'

~ Worked for 8 months with Apoorva

Dance Theatre, a group engaged with contemporary dance under the direction of Tripura Kashyap; studied elements of Mayurbhanj Chhau as part of the training and performed with the group in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Bangalore.



'I was fascinated by the form of the body and its lines which later became an inspiration for my drawing...'

'many times I have gone back to painting in the dilemma of attempting to do only one thing at a time... eventually I felt that by attempting only to paint I was getting very closed and introverted... and I needed to be in a field that is physical... I only know that I'm attracted by it so it must be what I want...'

~ Worked for 5 months creating an animation film for children; illustrated for a children's magazine; bicyclist.





YASMIN JASDANHALA

b. 1974

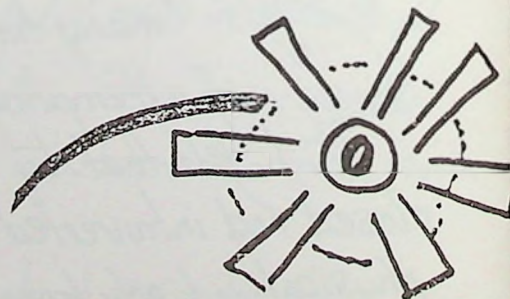
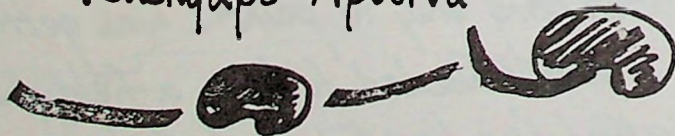
'it begins with wild dreams - like running away from home when I was twelve years old...'

~ B.Sc. in Home Science, Mount Carmel College, Bangalore; while at college, earned pocket money doing odd jobs as salesgirl, usher
'I found some direction... that I want to do something about the existing educational system...'

~ Has worked in the field of alternative education with ASTHA Educational Resource Centre, MAYA, and other NGOs working in the slums and rural areas in and around Bangalore;

~ worked as a model for the Ford agency with Prasad Bidappa; professional assignments in Bombay, Madras, Coimbatore, and Bangalore;

~ Worked and performed with Tripura Kashyap's Apoorva



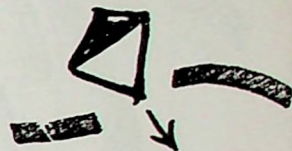
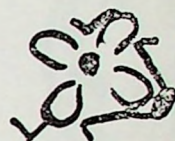
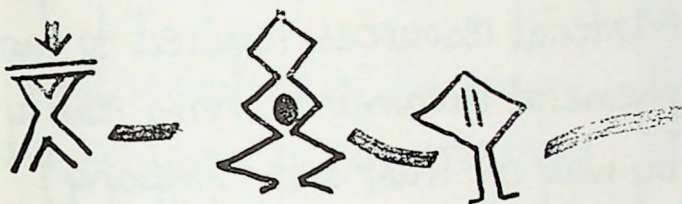
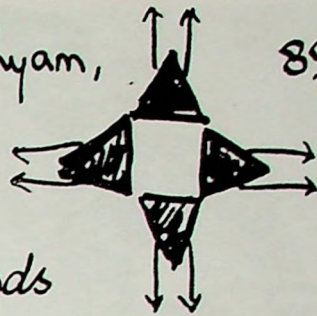
Dance Theatre; 1 month experience with dance pedagogist Angela Boethi; studied some Chhau as part of the training with Apoorva;

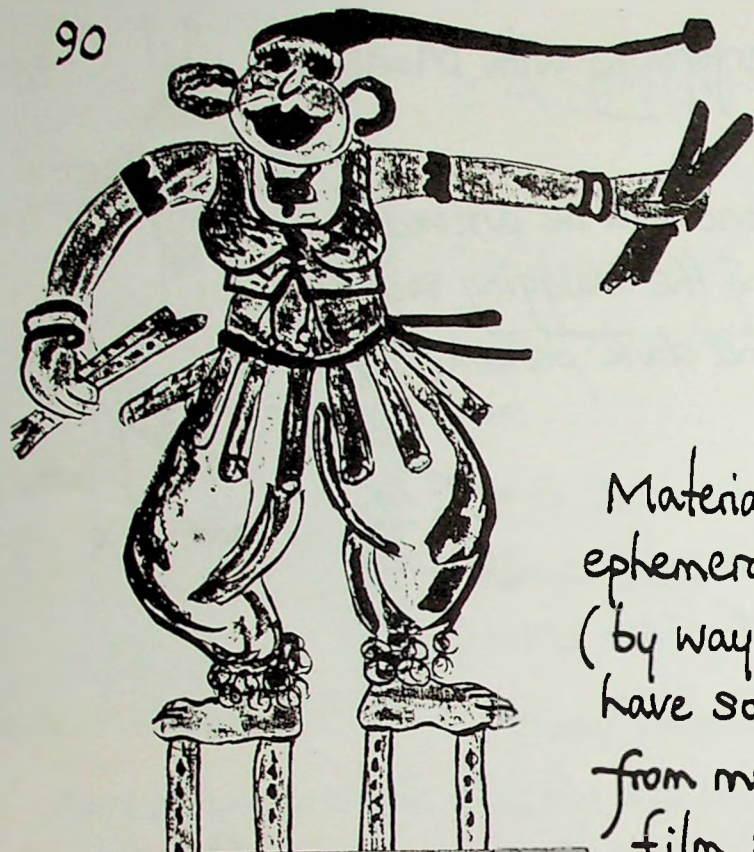


~ script writing and performing with Madhyam,
a street theatre group.

'destinations and stations will be arrived
at but now I'm enjoying the chugging sounds
and frames of light and dark passing by...'

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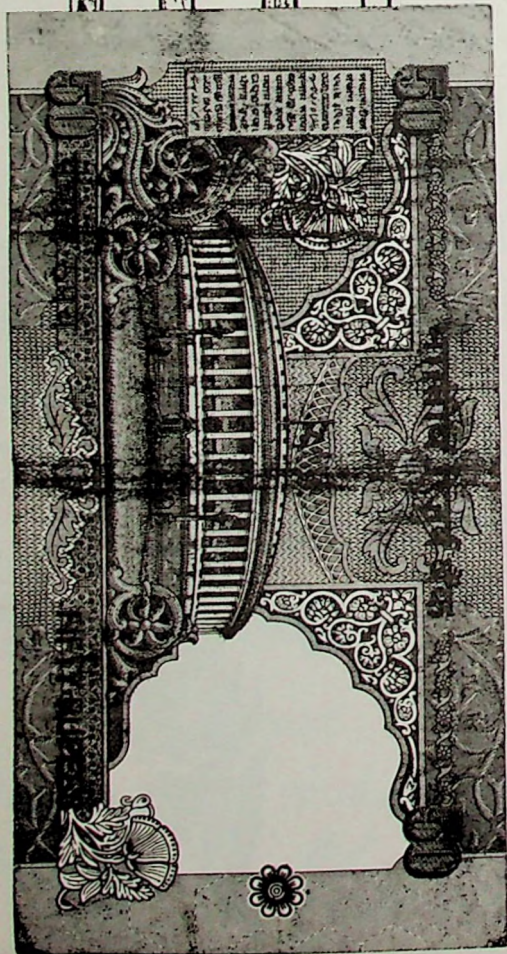
THE MATERIAL QUESTION

NOTE ON FINANCE

Material resources required to turn ephemeral dream into living reality (by way of Trust and company) have so far been provided entirely from my earnings for a role in a film shot last year (Hanuman, produced by Gaumont, Paris and Visual Eyes, Chennai; directed by Frédéric Fougère ~ so it seems that, rather than making it redundant, film makes theatre happen!).

Many people are helping us and bestowing us with gifts. Foremost amongst these is, of course, Sri Ram Devaraya who has granted us a workspace.

— Another friend is growing an acre of rice for us; a former



Student, Roysten Marks Abel, has sent make-up kits for the entire company; Shanna and Adam Shapiro have given us space; another friend, Anamika Haksar, has sent us a box of books...

Most members of the group are contributing towards their own food and personal expenditure. Some of us are supporting others.

However, despite everything, funds are dwindling rapidly with unexpected, unanticipated causes for expenditure. Although we can survive (we are obviously able to earn by various means but this would disturb our focus) we anticipate a period of difficulty during the next two years while we prepare a repertoire of performances. Some contributions during this time would help us considerably in maintaining a professional level of work.

We need money for food, for fuel, and the maintenance of our vehicle (lifeline to venues and locations), medical emergencies, stationery and postage, telecommunications,

22915593 CASH BILL 5285596

NEELIMA PETROLEUMS

Indian Oil Dealers, N H, 13, F. B. Dam

No. 1508 Date 8/1/98

Name _____

No.	Particulars	Amount
	Liters Petrol	
159	„ H.S.D. 11.64	197.80
	„ Oil	

Indent No. _____ Vehicle No. _____

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donations and subscriptions for the trust and also power to acquire or buy movable and immovable property that may be required for the purpose of the trust

properties, costumes, other equipment...

We appeal therefore to the public, the eventual beneficiaries (we hope) of our work, to keep us going with small or big donations.

We shall feel proud if we are able to produce a repertoire only with public support! It would be fitting since we exist for the public as a theatre company. Later, we hope to perform well enough to make you (and others!) want to buy tickets...

Any amount will help. Rs 1.00 will buy two matchboxes, Rs 10.00 two candles, Rs 50.00 will cover the cost of food for one actor over almost two days, Rs 100.00 will take us 100 kilometres

VOUCHER

Head of A/c.....

RECEIVED

PAID

the sum of Rupees

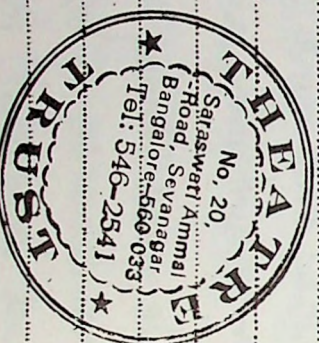
No.

Date.....

RECEIVED with thanks from.....

the sum of Rupees.....

on account of.....



Rs. _____

Signature

ಸಂಗಮೇಶ ಬುಕ್ ಡಿಪೋ

ಸಂಗಮೇಶ ಬುಕ್ ಡಿಪೋ, ಗಾಂಧಿ ಸರ್ಕುಲರ್, ಗಂಗಾವತಿ-583227.

SANGAMESH BOOK DEPOT

Gandhi Circle, Opp. Andhra Bank, GANGAVATI.

No. 386 CASH BILL Date 2-6-98

Sd/-

DATE	Qty.	Price	AMOUNT
	5	4	35.00

(SB) 31. V 1998

PAY

Theatre Trust

साक्षरक को OR BEARER

रुपये RUPEES

अदा करें

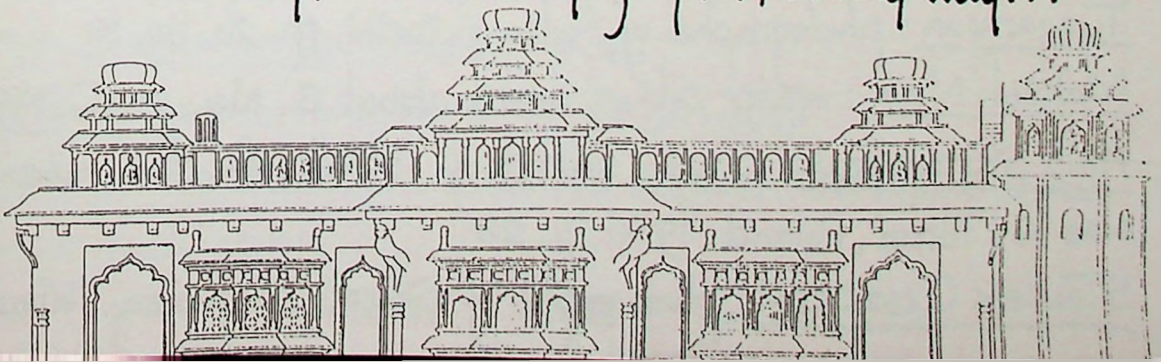
₹.Rs.

Any money received beyond our expenditure will go towards building up a corpus fund. We hope that eventually the interest from this corpus (along with earnings from performance and teaching) will cover salaries and expenditure.

At this moment our corpus fund totals Rs 20,000. Rs 10,000 was contributed by me to start a bank account. Rs 10,000 was earned by us when we conducted the workshop for Kadambari (though expenses amounted to about Rs 6,500).

21.1 The trustees shall regularly keep and maintain accounts of the trust properties and income and shall get the accounts duly audited by a chartered accountant every year.

I sincerely hope you will support us in what we are trying to do —
materially, in solidarity of spirit, in any way...



PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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SOURCES:

Shama Shapiro: photographs of group work in Harumanthalli and Anequadi area, cover.

pp. 2, 4, 9 ~ 12, 14, 15, 47, 50 ~ 55, 58, 69, 64, 65, 74 ~ 78, 80, 82, 84 ~ 89

Adil Hussain: photographs of ... Moner Manush in Mahesh Dattani's Studio, inside front cover, 1, 33, 34, 57;

Parvathy Gopalan Nair: cartoons, pp. 3, 5 ~ 8, 14, 15, 36, 46, 90, 91, 93, 96.

Khalid Tyabji: collages and sketches, pp. 3, 10, 21, 35, 56, 62, 63, 67, 73 ~ 75.

Vijayanagara Sexcentenary Commemoration Volume. Dharwar. 1936: illustrations, pp. 9 ~ 11, 70, 74, 93.

International Workshop Festival Brochure: photographs, pp. 9, 11.

Mariusz Jagiewski: photograph of improvisation in Poznań, p. 13.

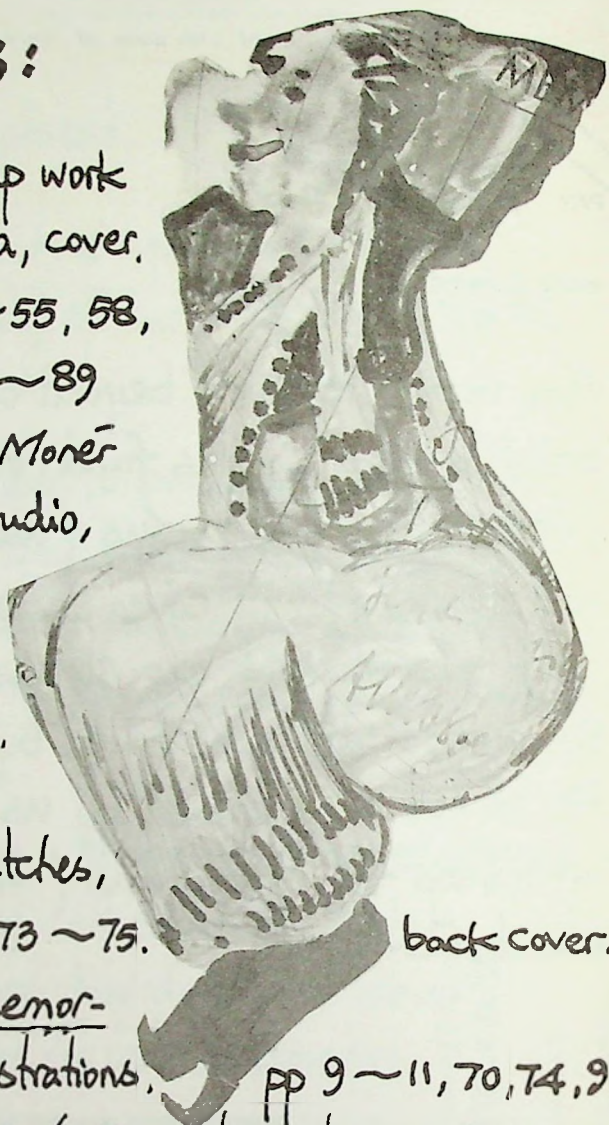
Sheba Chhachhi: photographs of Foolsong, training, navarasa, Delhi, pp. 16 ~ 18, 36.

Tyagarajan: photographs of Foolsong, Delhi, pp. 20, 30, 31

Makeish Naik: water colour, when about 8, New Delhi, 1990, p. 22

Ania Skrzypczak: crayon sketch of 'Khalid the fool', when she was 6, Toruń, Poland, 1986, p. 23.

STawek Oleszczuk: photographs of General Tom foolery, Wrocław,



Poland, 1987, p. 24

Steve Epstein, photographs of Foolshow, London, 1986, pp. 26 ~ 29, 49.

Ewa Modzelewska: photograph of interaction with autistic children, Warszawa, 1987, p. 28.

Maggie Murray: photograph of tomfoolery in a home for the aged and disabled, London, 1986, p. 29.

Manuel Bauer: photograph of Foolsong. Calcutta, 1994, p. 30; portrait, p. 45

Safina Uberoi: photographs of tomfoolery in Mongolpuri, Delhi, 1991, pp. 7, 25, 48; photograph of rehearsal with Bauls, p. 19.

Irène Rádo Vargas: photographs of Foolsong in her studio, London, 1987, p. 32

Streatham Studio, London: photograph of Foolsong, 1987, p. 45

Hema Choksi: photograph of 'open training', Hanumanhalli, 47.

Navroze Contractor: photographs of the Kadambari Workshop, Bangalore, 67-69, 76.

Biya Kumar: drawings and sketches, 60, 63, 68, 70 ~ 72.

Ritu Talwar: drawings, 60-62, 66.

Olga Hiszpanka: sketch, p. 60

Shanti Devi Uppal: drawings, 61, 66.

Yasmin Jasdanwala: drawing, p. 66.

Neha Sharma: photographs, p. 72, back cover.

Members of the ensemble: drawings adjacent to biographical notes on each actor.

Thank You !

AFTERWORD

The writing of the final version of these notes — report has suffered innumerable delays. Meanwhile the group has worked a further month, taken a six-week holiday and re-grouped on the land given to us to use as workspace. Two actors, Adil and Shanti, had a Lambani engagement in full costume and make-up; there was more tomfoolery in Anegundi where I also performed Foolsong. Recently, Jola Cynkutis worked with the company on individual propositions, training, and The Alchemist. All this will be further enumerated in the next report.

Two members of the company, Neha Sharma, and Gopal Biju Kumar have left us while four others have joined: Ashok Kumar, Ashwatthama (J.D.), Mallika Prasad and Poojarini Chaudhury. I look upon this coming and going as a natural, if unfortunate, part of group formation. There is, of necessity, a period of testing, finding out whether such work is for one; indeed, whether one is for such work.

Venkatesh, our driver, has also left. At present Adil and I function as drivers for the group. This is not easy or convenient to combine with other activities so we hope to have a replacement soon. A driver cum cook cum general handyman has been promised from Assam. Sounds too good!

9. ix. 1998

Bangalore.



ROUGH GLOSSARY OF INDIAN WORDS

p. 4, *sukha* : pleasure, content ; *dukha* : sorrow, pain, discontent ; *ananda* : felicity, joy, exhilaration ; p. 5, *hatha yogis* : practitioners of *hatha yoga* ; p. 7, *natya* : drama, theatre ; *Swadharma* : morality of self ; *swaraj* : self-governance ; p. 8, *mela* : fair, carnival ; p. 10, *riyaz*, *sadhana* : practice ; p. 11 : *natyadharmi* : theatrical mode ; p. 21, *sherwani* : formal long coat ; p. 22, *Natyashastra* : an ancient Sanskrit text on theatre practices ; p. 27, 'mental', colloquial expression for 'psychiatric case' ; p. 31, *aharyabhinaya* : the expression of adornment (costume, head-dress, jewellery...) ; p. 34, *Monēr Manush* : man of my heart/mind ; p. 36, *sur* : note, melody ; *tāl* : rhythm ; p. 48, *Sattvika* : of the mind ; *vacika* : of the voice ; *saṁsāra* : body ; p. 71, *khichdi* : dish of rice and lentils.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the preparation of this document I am much indebted to my brother Adit Tyabji's painstaking tidying of punctuation and expression ; to my sister Laila Tyabji for her perceptive comments ; to other friends for theirs ; to Ann Britto for pushing me towards articulation...



*Our first earning as a group,
from a company of Lambanis.
Holi, Hanumanhalli.*





Khalid Tyabji
31. v. 1998
Hanumanthalli
revised, Bangalore 9. ix. 1998

