The Performance Group in India

February-April 1976

Richard Schechner

Program

Tour funded by JDR 3rd Fund, New York, who paid for overseas transportation, and contributed towards production and TPG living and travel expenses in India. Local sponsors in India paid for most of the local production costs and provided most of the living accommodation for TPG members. Local sponsors also donated in-kind work on publicity, the environments, and day-to-day running of the shows. United States Information Service paid for much of the advertising in India; also USIS paid TPG members for leading workshops in Calcutta and Bombay. TPG contributed money toward salaries while on tour and production expenses.

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The Company, in order of speaking:

STEPHEN BORST as Recruiter, Chaplain, Lieutenant
JAMES GRIFFITHS as Sergeant, Cook, Poldi, Soldier
JOAN MACINTOSH as Mother Courage (Anna Fierling)
JAMES CLAYBURGH as Eilif, Man With A Patch Over His Eye, Clerk, Soldier
SPALDING GRAY as Swiss Cheese, Soldier, Peasant
ELIZABETH LECOMPTE as General, Yvette, Peasant
RON VAWTER as Ordnance Officer, Townspeople
BRUCE RAYVID as Soldier, Another Sergeant, Peasant
LEENY SACK as Kattrin

Environment designed by JAMES CLAYBURGH
Musical director & pianist, MIRIAM CHARNEY
Technical director, BRUCE RAYVID
Costumes, THEODORA SKIPITARES
Technical director in India, V. RAMAMURTHY
Associate technical director for Bhopal and Bombay, BENU GANGULY
Technical assistants, KAS SELF, MUNIERA CHRISTIANSEN
General Manager & drummer, RON VAWTER
Director, RICHARD SCHECHNER

Music by PAUL DESSAU
Translated from the German by RALPH MANHEIM
MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN by BERTOLT BRECHT
(Written 1938; World Premier, Zurich, 1939)

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Tour Outline: 6 Localities, 23 Performances, 56 Days

Place	*Dates*	*Sponsors*
New Delhi Modern School Gymnasium	February 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21: 9 performances	Abhiyan Rajinder Nath Som Nath Sapru M. N. Kapur, Principal of Modern School
Lucknow A private motor garage	February 27, 28: 2 performances	Theatre Arts Workshop Raj Bisaria
Calcutta Abhinav Bharati Theatre	March 9, 10, 12, 13, 14: 5 performances	Anamika Kala Sangam Shyamanand Jalan Bishwambhar Sureka Naveen Kishore
Singjole Under two trees	March 18: 1 performance	Tagore Society Barin Saha Badal Sircar
Bhopal Ravindra Bhawan	March 26, 27: 2 performances	Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad Ashok Bajpeyi Satyan Kumar Benu Ganguly
Bombay Cathedral and John Connon School courtyard	April 3, 4, 5, 6: 4 performances	National Centre for the Performing Arts Narayana Menon K. K. Suvarna K. Kuruvila Jacob, Principal of Cathedral and John Connon School

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There is a life rhythm to any group that presumes to the status of ensemble. At intervals it re-creates itself, or ends. The Performance Group (TPG) began in 1967, re-created itself in 1970, again in 1972, and again at this moment (summer-fall 1976). Re-creation isn't simply about people coming and going: people leave for reasons and join because they feel their careers and the Group's trajectory are moving in the same direction. In the winter of 1975 Timothy Shelton who played Eilif left TPG because he wanted to test himself in commercial theatre and because TPG didn't offer him the range of roles or the position within the Group that he needed. At the end of the India tour James Griffiths (the Cook) left because he wanted to work in a "directorless" group in San Francisco. But even more basic shifts are taking place as long-time members of TPG create their own works separate from me, and we all re-construct relationships to each other. There is a

long history of working together: MacIntosh and I have been at TPG since 1967; Borst joined in 1969 summer and Gray later that year; LeCompte and Griffiths joined in 1970, Clayburgh in 1972, Sack in 1973, and Vawter in 1974. Rayvid has worked with TPG since 1973 but became a "provisional member" in 1975. Charney was taken on specifically for the India tour when Alexandra Ivanoff said she didn't want to make the trip.

The changes within TPG reached a critical stage during our India tour. Two rhythms interacted: (1) as individuals and as a theatre we met audiences, sponsors, and the multiplicity called India, itself undergoing stress and change during the Emergency; (2) within each of us and as TPG we began to work through—by means of two sets of talks, one in Calcutta in March and one at Juhu Beach near Bombay right after the tour's end in April—our past relationships, present circumstances, future arrangements. There's no doubt that the high of the tour—we were praised even when our work fell short—mixed with its difficulties to bring on the crisis within TPG. It's hard to adjust to a strange culture when you're running around the country on a breakneck schedule needing to perform artistically and socially at every stop. More so when, as we wanted, we didn't get transplanted from one Western style hotel to another — but lived with families, in Indian style tourist bungalows and, as much as time allowed, interacted through workshops and meetings with Indian theatre people. So I'm writing not only a travel journal but an exposition of the group-making process as I see it manifesting itself under stress. I'll probe as deeply as I can how the tour worked on TPG: I'll make suggestions for future tours. But first I must review how *Mother Courage* (*MC*) was developed in New York, and how its preparation relates to TPG's over-all work.

Work on MC *in New York*

We began in April 1974, the same time we decided to come to India. All roles are cast from inside TPG. This in-looking leads to "role clusters", a chorus-like effect as different characters are played by the same performers and costumes carry over from one role to another. For examples, Borst and Griffiths play Recruiter and Sergeant in scene 1 and Lieutenant and Sergeant in scene 11; Gray and LeCompte play the peasants in scene 5, 10, 11, 12; Gray and Shelton play Swiss Cheese and Eilif and the two soldiers in scene 6. The blue officer's coat is worn by Recruiter Poldi in scene 3, Clerk in scene 6, and Lieutenant; the khaki soldier's coat is worn by Sergeant in scene 1, Soldier in scenes 3 and 6, and Sergeant in scene 11. But necessity and chance also operate: only the Chaplain and Cook aren't in scene 1; when Shelton left TPG, Rayvid took the roles of soldier and peasant son, while Clayburgh took Eilif. Desire also counts: LeCompte wanted to play the General in scene 2—and this meshed with my wanting to show a woman in a role traditionally linked to male power. In costume she looked like South Vietnamese dictator Ki; this added parody to the role. Also everyone was musician, stagehand, supper-server, and reader of the introductions to scenes. Seeing the performer playing Eilif adjust the ropes, hearing the one playing (mute) Kattrin read the introduction to scene 2, or getting supper served by the person playing the Chaplain all help open conceptual spaces

between performers and roles, dramatic narrative and theatrical environment. These methods, long a part of TPG's work, agree well with Brecht's *verfrumsdungeffekt.*

From April through June 1974 we worked upstairs at the Performing Garage in a space 40' by 25'. Our main theatre was full of the environment for Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* which we were performing four times a week. We worked on *MC* about 5 hours a day, four days a week. *Tooth* closed in June and we began teaching days at NYU—rehearsals of *MC* shifted to the 50' by 35' by 18' (height) main theatre, and we worked four nights a week from 7 to 11 during July and half of August. Then we left on a tour of Europe with *Tooth.* (The summer was very full: part of the NYU work was developing the script of David Gaard's *The Marilyn Project* which opened 18 months later in December 1975.) During the six weeks' work on *MC,* Clayburgh and Jerry Rojo set up the basic environment: a "wagon-store" area against the west wall, a bridge across the center of the room (later demolished), galleries at two levels all around (adapted from *Tooth*), an open pit 6' by 25' by 8' deep along the north wall. We decided to play several scenes outdoors on Wooster Street which runs along the east side of our theatre building. It wasn't until November 1974 that we rehearsed *MC* full time, five days a week, six or seven hours a day. It opened in February 1975.

After one read-through the performers were on their feet wrestling with the physical problems: what should the wagon be? how does Courage move? what props were essential? what sounds does Kattrin make? etc. etc. I don't believe in "work around the table" or talk-analysis of characters: it all happens up against the problems of staging, and in constructing not just characterization but the entire world of the performance, including the roles of the spectators. I get the performers moving around, with someone feeding lines so the words are learned through the ear, as speech. I've seen the same technique used in Jatra rehearsals. Performers work from the situations of the play, improvising, testing moves, gestures, arrangements, readings. I select blocking and line-readings from what's offered—my job is like that of a sculptor building up and whittling down material already there. Everything is kept fluid for many weeks. But it's not a question of vagueness: one concrete solution yields to another in an exploratory sequence of experiments.

For example, at first the wagon was a costume trunk on wheels to which we attached ropes. After a week this was rejected, and with it the whole idea of a rolling wagon. Any wagon of appropriate size would dominate our theatre as a center-piece environment like the one we already had for *Tooth.* A rolling wagon automatically referred us to Brecht's (and every other) *MC* production making it impossible to investigate the play in a totally new American way. Soon we began to use the idea of a "store" anchored against the west end of our theatre. But then the problem was how to physicalize pulling, trekking the roads, back-bending labor; how to show one person exploiting another through oppressive labor and the transformation of human beings into animals dragging a load. Rojo, Clayburgh, and I discussed

pulleys, ropes, blocks-and-tackle. One afternoon in May, Clayburgh arrived with this stuff—and immediately the performers tested it. Shelton ran his feet bloody trying to pull free from MacIntosh's hold — but the pulley system gave her a three-to-one advantage: here was the physical expression of exploitation and one person's control over another. Clayburgh hitched the tackle to the wall and put Borst on the hook. The visual-sonic effect was stunning: leaning out at a 45 degree angle, running with all his might but getting nowhere, the tackle jangling behind him, the ropes rising and falling in rhythm with his strides: scene 7 was born. The equipment was flexible: ropes could divide the space any way; they could be strung at any angle; they could hoist, drop, pull, and hold. From that afternoon Clayburgh began working out in detail how the rope-and-pulley system would be used in each scene. With only slight modification this system was used in India exactly as in New York. And from the beginning in 1974 it was clear that everyone would help in scene shifts—these were to be an integral part of the performance.

Paul Dessau's music was from the very start of rehearsals another backbone of the production. If the text and actions were experimented with freely, we applied ourselves with rigor to the Dessau score. Thus a dialectic operated at the center of the rehearsal process. Richard Fire worked with us through June. Thereafter Ivanoff, a classical singer, became TPG's musical director. Her work went beyond teaching the Dessau score. She trained people in singing, combined traditional musical discipline with an appetite for new ways to make sound. Both these trends are heard in *MC.* They also reach back to TPG work in *Tooth, Concert* (1971), *Commune* (1970), and *Makbeth* (1969).

Brecht posits a dialectic between business, war, and dehumanization: the interaction of war and business results in dehumanization. No full-scale war has been fought in America since the Civil War and the wars against the American Indians of the 19th century. So I decided to emphasize business and through it to manifest the whole system. All details were organized accordingly. The south wall of the theatre was plastered with a mixture of super-market food ads and armed forces enlistment posters. As spectators enter the theatre they come to me where I sit behind a large cash-register collecting the admissions' charge—no tickets were sold in advance, everyone paid cash at the door. Each time money is taken, exchanged, or mentioned throughout the performance the register bell is rung: from the first spectator in to the moment when Courage gives the Peasant Woman some dollars to bury Kattrin the register bell itemizes each transaction. Vawter counts the night's receipts at his desk near his drum-set; real cash is used as props and about $50 is in circulation; a "gold brick" monoprop is used to ikonize the valuable items Courage accumulates and sells, and as Swiss Cheese's cash box. In scene 6 Kattrin saves the "gold brick" even at the cost of being raped. Courage curses the war and throws the brick down at the end of scene 6—but then she changes her mind and clutches the brick to her breast. Yvette takes cash from the soldiers who patronize her prostitute's business; and it is Poldi's money that Yvette loans to Courage to ransom Swiss Cheese. But Courage gets the money only when she mortgages the store-wagon, and her haggling costs Swiss Cheese his life. Courage is always doing business—yet the more business she does the poorer she gets.

In TPG performers develop roles on their own. As director I'm concerned with the continuity of training and, for each production, with the visual and sonic scores. Directing is mostly watching and selecting. I comment on rhythms, balance between silence and sound, gestures, groupings. I find in what the performers do things to be retained and things to be eliminated. I make suggestions—but my inventions are based on theirs. I move around to all the places where the audience will be: I'm not interested in a single-perspective picture but a whole environment. I don't talk much about the psychology of characters, feelings, motivations, or objectives. First of all, my colleagues are better trained and more competent in these matters than I; secondly, as Stanislavski showed in his "method of physical actions", affects will arise on their own if the physical score is precise. What we do discuss is the physical score, the technical aspects—how everything is to be integrated, and the meaning of the play in social terms as it is worked out concretely in the production through the fundamental interaction between performers and spectators. I've given examples in the uses of ropes and money; but every aspect is worked through in meticulous detail. Improvisation is a valuable training and rehearsal tool, but in performance it is unreliable. Of course, performers working so close to spectators deal with contingencies—but these are best described as permutations on the score, not improvisations.

Triumphs of acting arise from patience, repetition, and the ability to re-do scenes that've been unchanged for months. In TPG we have no fear of developing idiosyncratic, divergent, or even contradictory interpretations if these are—or lead to—meeting places of an individual performer's impulses and the production's logic. So much fails, one or the other, and great performing happens only when the two meet. This method pulls us off-course for weeks as when we tried again and again to find a balance between Gray's one-syllable-at-a-time Swiss Cheese and Brecht's simpleton Christ. Once an action is accepted it is rehearsed ruthlessly. It took many hours to score Kattrin's death fall in scene 11 with the heel of her red boot caught on the edge of the ladder; or Yvette's sexual poses during the intercourse section of scene 3 so that the transfer of money from the soldiers to Yvette is visually prominent; or the cracked-voice lullaby Courage sings to Kattrin's corpse in scene 12 followed by her hyena-like stripping of the corpse of its resellable clothes. At the end of the play Courage is hitched to every rope in the theatre: she is enmeshed in her own web, she carries the audience with her, the whole space seems to be moving. To stage this Clayburgh worked backwards from scene 12 to scene 5 figuring how each rope had to be set so that all could be finally gathered at a single terminus. It was only after five months' work that scenes were run through without stopping—to run through too soon freezes work, reducing its experimental potential. Even after *MC* opened we met three hours before each performance for warm-ups, notes on the previous performance with suggestions for the show at hand, rehearsals of scenes and music. Months before *MC* opened—while it was very rough—spectators came to open rehearsals. In July these spectators were students from our NYU workshops; in November colleagues from other theatres and friends came; the general public was invited through newspaper ads in December. Thus *MC* developed under

the public eye and retains the style of a tribunal. But also there is a sense of celebration—heightened by the full supper served after scene 3. In India this supper was more of a snack—but in America it is a full meal at a cheap price. Audiences at open rehearsals, and during the run too (performers talk to the spectators during the supper), share their reactions, make suggestions, and through their very behavior help test the production as it develops. The spectator isn't a numb consumer welcome only after the creative work is done, but part of the process from its most formative stages. And the creative work is never ended—even during the fall of 1975—while TPG was preparing four new works—changes were made in *MC.* And in India too changes were made.

The Schedule, The People

We arrived in Delhi on the morning of February 3, twelve of us on the Air India weekly charter from Amsterdam. Joan and I have been to India before, in 1971. At the airport were Suresh Awasthi who originated the idea of TPG coming to India, Rajinder Nath of Abhiyan our Delhi sponsors, and V. Ramamurthy (Murti), our Indian tech director. An immediate plunge into work: we accept the old gymn at the Modern School as the place to build the environment; Clayburgh negotiates with Amrit Lal Nayar, a contractor, to supply us with "slotted angles" and plywood and we decide to haul the environment around India rather than build from scratch at each site. The expense of acquiring the stuff and trucking it was not expected. Also we learned that our Delhi budget was to be met from box office—thus ticket prices would be at Rs. 10, very high, and still there'd be a big loss. In fact, the same box office arrangement was made at Lucknow, while at Calcutta, Bhopal, and Bombay our sponsors took responsibility for meeting living and production costs. But everywhere the tickets ranged up to Rs. 10. We had a grant of $21,000 from the JDR 3rd Fund—and with this we paid international and India travel, salaries, per diem allowances, and costs in Delhi and Lucknow. The grant didn't cover all these expenses, nor was it meant to; TPG's savings and other contributions added $13,000 to the kitty. The tour was very expensive, possibly too much so. In the future we ought to develop a simple, easily transportable or, even better, duplicatable environment. But nothing can save on the biggest expense, international air travel, which came to over $11,000.

With a hired crew of laborers, help from E. Alkazi and students of the National School of Drama (NSD) and volunteers from different Delhi theatres, work on the environment went well. Alkazi arranges for us to borrow lights not only for Delhi but for the whole tour. Then a big snag: Customs won't release our costumes, props, ropes and pulleys until we put up a Rs. 81,000 bond. After two days of negotiations I personally guarantee the money underwriting a Letter of Credit TPG brought to India to cover expenses; my guarantee is in turn guaranteed by the United States Educational Foundation in India. (I'm a Fulbright scholar this year); and, finally, Grindlay's bank puts up the Rs. 81,000 bond and our stuff is liberated. Waiting for hours at the Palam customs shed I stare at a sign over the officer's desk: "I am not interested in excuses for delay. I am interested only

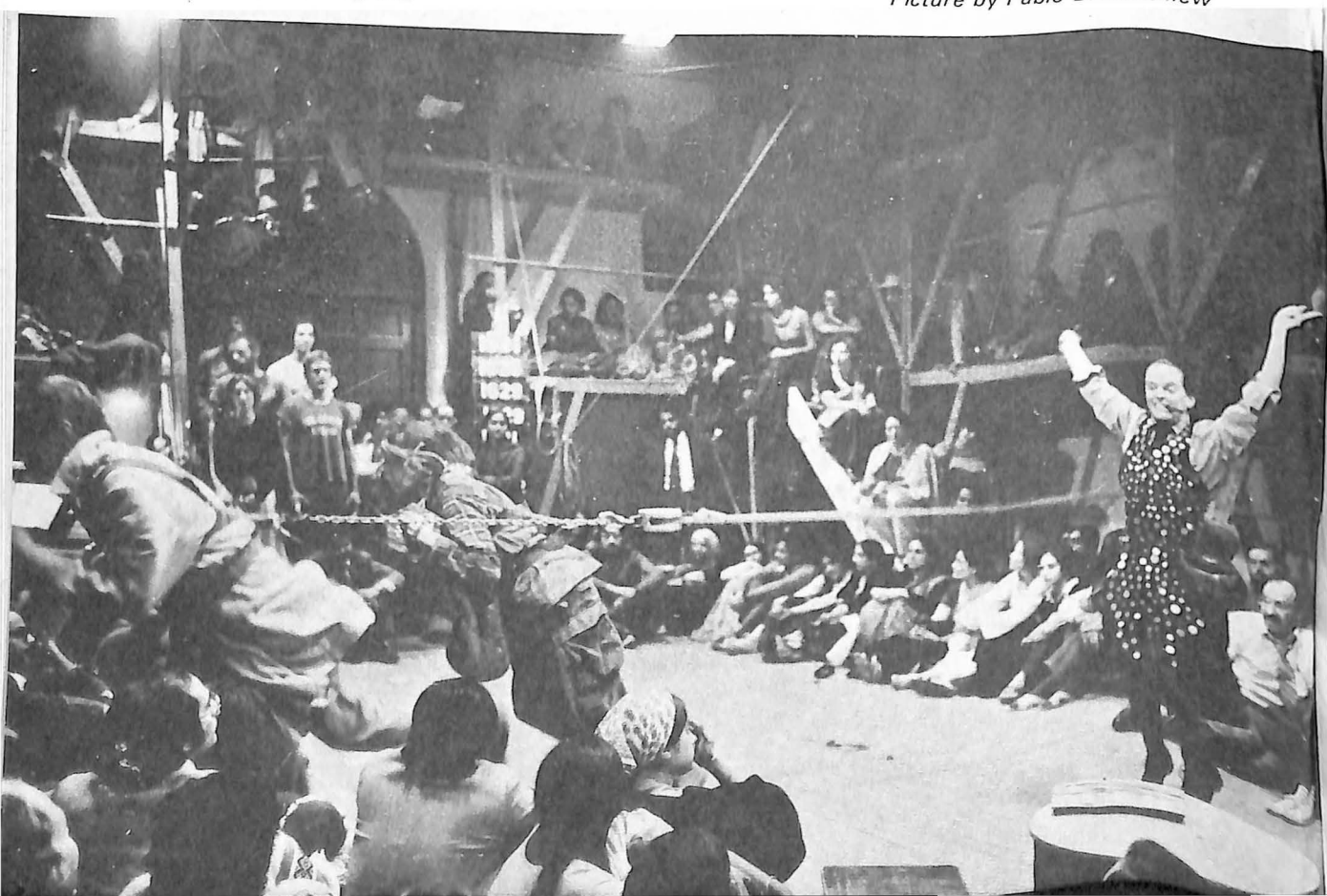
in a thing done" Jawaharlal Nehru. We get our equipment on February 7, two days before dress rehearsal.

On February 10 *MC* opens to a full house; but by the end about one-third had gone. Possibly they didn't expect a four-hour performance during which they sat on hard wood planks, on the floor, or moved about. My immediate reactions as recorded in my notebook:

> *Environment too long for its width. Acoustics bad. One-third of the audience left at intermission; one-third very appreciative. They rushed up to the performers and me after the show and showered us with congratulations. Mostly authentic, some just being polite. The show itself was slow and ragged. . . . Mistakes last night: Joan dropped her "pulpit" speech in scene 3; I got the ropes wrong in scene 2; Griffiths went dry for lines in scene 9; the rope got stuck and Kattrin's ladder wouldn't go up for scene 11—we had to stop the show, fix it, and then go on. It was very hard to hear. People strained their voices. In the other places we should make the environment better proportioned. The theatre is filthy—the dirt road outside means dirt gets tracked in and the place gets suffocatingly dusty so it's hard to speak.*
>
> *February 11*

TPG performing MC

Picture by Pablo Bartholemew



And Joan said in her notebook:

> *I was rolling in dirt. I breathed dirt, dry earth dirt. I strained my voice between a dirt-clogged throat and bad acoustics. I felt like I could have been anywhere on tour doing* MC *not in India. . . . I was exhausted, hungry, sick to my stomach. The wheelbarrow—used as a market basket—didn't work. I slipped and fell on the wagon steps. I spilled a bucket of water on an audience member in scene 3. And yet the Indians loved it. One man squeezed my hand so hard I thought he had broken my knuckles. Scene 12 took on a special meaning to me here of an Indian peasant woman beggar tromping through the dusty countryside, stumbling, enduring . . . During the show I was not at all nervous, only angry or concentrated on what needed to be done: keeping the story clear. The audience's reaction was pleasing, but being a perfectionist I wasn't satisfied. It could've been better.*
>
> *February 11*

It got better. The best performance in Delhi—and one of the best of the tour—occurred on February 13, Friday night. It takes a great audience to make a great performance. They kept pushing in until there were too many of them, probably about 350. The performers bitched—but again and again I've seen that when something unexpected and hard happens—too big a house, a sudden error, a part of the environment that fails, etc.—the performance either collapses or overcomes the challenge luminously: through all the work the clarity of the play's themes and the skill of the performers, the sheer beauty of the event, comes through as it does in athletics.

At the same time that the performances were bringing TPG together, long-range problems troubled us all. On February 11 I wrote:

> *New rhythms are needed: a theatre with (1) strong leadership working for (2) continuous training and opening up (3) doing performances in many places before different kinds of people (4) alternating between commercial and non-commercial work. . . . TPG is no longer the arena, if it ever was, where people (all, including me) can go beyond.*

Instead of feeling encouraged-liberated by the group structure, I felt suffocated. I wasn't alone in thinking this way. Steve, Liz and Spalding wanted to direct and/or compose their own work; Joan wanted to find autonomy as a performer similar to what the others sought as directors and composers; Leeny wasn't sure what she wanted to do; etc. At the same time we didn't want to bust TPG up. We were looking for new arrangements. As often happens in our Group people began talking informally with each other about these feelings—and pressure built to have formal meetings.

In Delhi too the first inklings of the "sex problem" appeared. In scene 3, Yvette and three soldiers perform a stylized mimicry of copulation while on the other side of the space Courage smears Kattrin's face with mud in order to make her unattractive to rapacious soldiers. The meaning is clear: in war a safe face is one smeared with filth, and love is mostly a business transaction. Two days after we opened Principal M. N. Kapur of the Modern School told me that this scene had repercussions among the governing board of the school. He also felt that it distorted our production—some people came to *MC* just to see it, others stayed away because of it.

I discussed the issue with the Group. They argued that TPG hadn't come to India to show how Indians would stage *MC* but how Americans did. I felt torn because Kapur had been of great help to us, exceedingly generous. Just before a performance, as I was about to insist on some modifications in the scene, Kapur came up to me and said: "No, don't change anything. Do what is right for your work". My respect for him is deep.

The performances in Chandigarh were cancelled for lack of a suitable space. The Group went on to Lucknow while Steve and I went to Chandigarh to run a workshop. This and other workshops will be discussed later. When we got to Lucknow people were settled at the Government Tourist Bungalow only three blocks from the motor garage where the environment was being set up. Murti tells of delays up to six hours trucking the environment down from Delhi through octroi posts. Experience is teaching us about the local, regional, cultural, religious, political, and linguistic rivalries that both enrich and debilitate India. These rivalries shadowed us in Delhi and Calcutta, and affect us directly in Lucknow. Originally our Lucknow sponsors were Darpan, and the contact Awasthi gave me was Kunwar Narain. On October 10, 1975 I wrote a detailed letter to all our sponsors outlining exactly what TPG needed to stage *MC*. The three page single-spaced letter emphasized the following:

> *1. TPG does not perform in a proscenium theatre or in any way separate the audience from the performers. As the enclosed photographs show, the audience sits among the performers, or stands around them. . . . Thus instead of a regular theatre we need a large room for our performance. . . . When we do perform on a proscenium stage we put the entire audience on the stage—no one sits in the house, the curtain remains closed. Thus we can perform on a very large proscenium stage. Also we can perform in a gymnasium or a large banquet hall. In every case we need large quantities of scaffolding to build up the theatre.*
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> *2. The performance of* MC *takes nearly 4 hours. After scene 3 we serve a supper to the audience . . . This meal is not "entertainment" but still it is very much part of the performance; it is important to the themes of the play.*

Incidentally, the supper did not work well at all in India. It was more an interval snack than a continuation of Courage's business. Indians don't eat at 7.30; they like to sit down; they eat in family groupings. Also all we could arrange to serve were snacks. In America the meal is actually a good bargain of bread, cheese, soup with meat and/or vegetables, fruit, and beverage. The performers assist in serving the meal. It was cooked by people from our workshops (who were paid for the job) upstairs at our theatre.

> *3. One of the scenes is played in the street outside the theatre. In New York a big door opens and the audience remains inside looking through the door at the performers who are standing in the street. On tour we are sometimes able to play this scene as in New York—but we can also play it indoors if necessary.*

In Delhi this scene worked well because the Modern School Gymnasium had a door that could be used like the one in New York. And in Bhopal where we performed on the large proscenium stage of the Kala Parishad's Ravindra Bhawan this scene was played in a field behind the theatre using an ox cart as MC's wagon. A special platform was constructed in Calcutta because the

stage door was 12 feet above the street level. In Bombay the whole play was outdoors in the Cathedral and John Connon School courtyard and scene 9 was played within the regular performing space. In Lucknow the scene was played at the entrance to the motor garage, but not actually in the street. Nowhere did the scene work as well as in New York where Wooster Street carries light traffic and the scene gathers a small crowd of passersby. Also during winter the weather enters the theatre, spectators wrap themselves in their coats, the feeling of the final scenes (9 through 12) is very bleak. Courage's talk about winter is actualized.

On 29 October I had a long letter from Narain. "I could not write to you immediately", he said, "as I waited for a confirmation from Darpan who wanted a little time to consider all your requirements and discuss them with their members so that they could make a definite commitment to you. They now assure me that adequate arrangements can be made". I heard nothing from Darpan until 13 November when B. C. Gupta wrote agreeing to my proposed schedule and other details. That same day Gupta wrote Murti saying, "the whole Darpan team will be at your disposal". So I was surprised when I arrived in Lucknow to find out that Darpan wasn't sponsoring TPG at all. At the last minute Raj Bisaria and his Theatre Arts Workshop had taken over. I never found out what happened—only that no love was lost between the rival groups. Everywhere the Indian theatre is plagued by factionalism. But the modern theatre—particularly that wing that wants to do new work, experimental work—is not strong enough to afford factionalism. Throughout my week in Lucknow I split my time between Narain—who I found to be intelligent and perceptive—and Bisaria who worked day and night with his crew to get *MC* up and going. Things were tense all around.

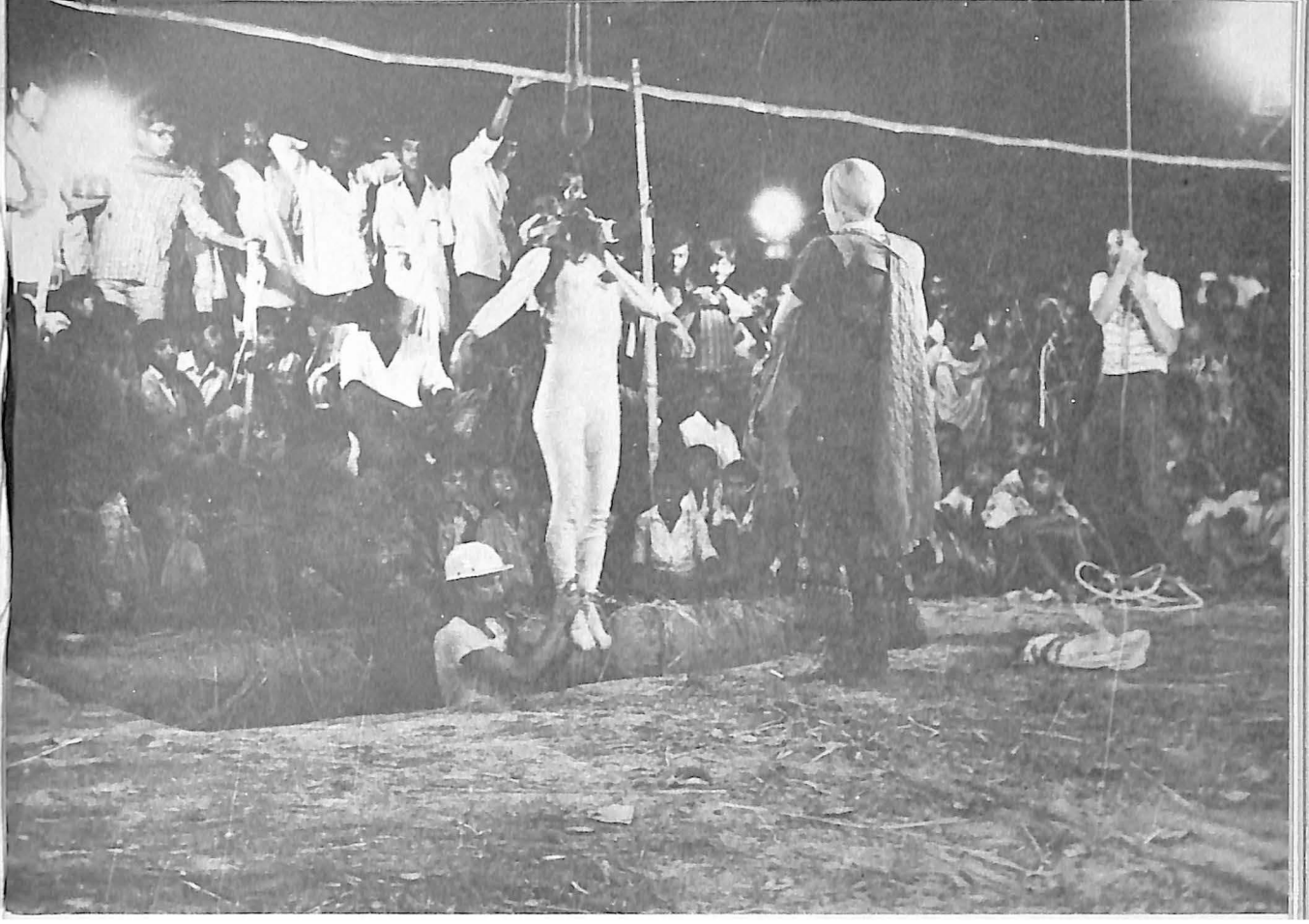
The environment was extraordinary, a motor garage, where amid piles of tires, broken down cars, and steel girders we set up *MC.* We didn't use the whole 100 by 200 foot space but lashed slotted angles to girders. *MC* looked beautiful but the Lucknow audience was confused; they lay back from the production. Bisaria explained that relatively few people in Lucknow know English, especially the American dialect TPG speaks. And environmental theatre was new for Lucknow—though I never tired of explaining the structural and conceptual links between it and traditional Indian theatre like Jatra, Kathakali, Ramlila. But a gap has opened between modern Indian theatre and traditional forms. The issue is complex because the traditional forms are exciting theatrically but ideologically and socially they are often reactionary; or, as in Jatra, commercial melodramas. Modern theatre's problem is how to use the staging and direct relation to the audience of the folk forms without at the same time falling into their reactionary *mytho-poesis.* The answer is not in imitation or adaptation. Rather I suggest that writers, designers, and actors fully experience the folk forms, and get training in these forms—and then "forget" what they've learned; fully digesting the techniques so that these become part of the muscle of their own work. It is at the level of body consciousness, integration of music and rhythmic movement, environmental staging, and direct contact with the audience that modern groups can use traditional theatre.

One of the best things at Lucknow was how about 75 poor people came to the show. At first they stood outside—they could see in because one side of the building had no wall. Not all the tickets were sold and during a scene change I gestured for the poor to come in. Most of the adults held back but the kids came. They found places on the floor and in the corners of the environment: they were skilled at fitting into crevices, spaces in the social structure rejected by richer people. And about 50 people scampered across the roof, peering down through the opening between the peaked roof and the horizontal walls. Paying spectators ignored this new group, or moved away slightly. I remembered my 9 years in the deep South of the USA where blacks were legislatively "part of" and "equal to" whites but actually kept "apart from" in a conceptual if not physical sense.

By Lucknow TPG had come down from the high of first arrival in India. Almost everyone was sick. And problems that troubled us in America, but were put aside for the tour, reasserted themselves. These boiled down to the fact that TPG is 9 years old, its members are entering or in their 30s (and I'm 42). People want "autonomy" and their own "artistic identities". They don't want to be known as "members of Richard Schechner's Performance Group". At the same time I want my leadership acknowledged within the Group. By the end of our stay in Lucknow everyone knew that we needed some full group discussions and these were set for Calcutta.

The Abhinav Bharati theatre off Shakespeare Sarani in Calcutta wasn't finished when we set up there. The audience entered through piles of junk, scraps from sets, hardware—and passed over a plank-boardwalk to the stage where we'd set up *MC*. The environment combined folk and modern elements—the gird was of bamboo, and bamboo railings lined the galleries. Everything went smoothly in Calcutta because of the superb organization led by Shyamanand Jalan and Bishu Sureka. They were of great help on the rest of the tour too. Also in Calcutta we picked up our relationship with Badal Sircar who'd come to North America and worked with TPG in 1972. Space limitations prevent me from discussing Sircar's newest work—done outdoors, in villages, in environmental spaces — *Spartacus, Michil, Bhoma.* I say only that of the modern theatre I've seen in India Sircar's Satabdi and the Repertory Company of the NSD are doing the most important work. Performances in Calcutta went smoothly except for the "sex issue" which came to a head after an unsigned review in the Hindi paper, *Vishvamitra*, proclaimed: "The most daring use of this environment is made when the actors, both male and female, in full view of the audience and in full illumination strip down completely and change their costumes. In this manner they educate the audience—acting out everything, even the way a woman is disgraced as the soldiers fornicate with her". The day this review appeared we were besieged by men who offered me up to Rs. 100 for a ticket; women with tickets stayed away; men fought on the street in front of the theatre. At interval I said, "The sex scene is over, so if that's what you came for, eat your supper and go". Many left, maybe forty men.

The "sex issue" exploded in Calcutta but it was there in Delhi and Bhopal too. Granted that standards vary greatly from USA to India, *MC* is



MC *performed in Singjole* *Picture by Richard Schechner*

not a sex show. Costume changes are done in the Green Room—dressing room which is intentionally visible for the same reason that we show every technical aspect of the production; but no one is naked—and there's absolutely no connection between the Yvette part of scene 3 and the costume changes. The scene itself balances Yvette's business of prostitution with Courage's smearing mud on Kattrin's face so that she'll appear unattractive to the sex-starved soldiers. Ironically, the males who stormed the Abhinav Bharati were like the soldiers of scene 3—and at root neither soldiers nor spectators are to be blamed. The fault lies with a repressive sexual censorship.

On March 18, under arrangements made by Sircar and Barain Saha, we performed *MC* in Singjole, a village about 3 hours outside of Calcutta. In fact, however, one of our Calcutta sponsors (not Jalan or Sureka) opposed this performance. Shortly before leaving for India I got a letter from Calcutta dated 5 January 1976:

> *I would strongly suggest, after consulting people in the theatre field, not to produce the play in any village as it will not only cost a huge amount of money and hard work, but also it will be very difficult to attract the required audience, as the atmosphere in our villages has not yet reached the standard to appreciate productions like yours. Please clarify the situation immediately.*

I wrote back on 16 January:

> *It is very important to us to be able to play in villages—we want our work to reach the people who live in the villages, no matter how difficult that may be. We are willing to adjust our staging to suit village conditions: outdoors spaces, courtyards, bad lighting or no stage lighting at all. . . . It is most important to us that we perform for a cross-section of the Indian public. This is the other reason why we insist on trying to perform, for no charge, in a village near Calcutta.*

The production cost almost nothing because we set up under two large trees using them as the grid for our rope system; a trench was dug that came very close to the pit we have in New York; we lit the show with petromax lanterns; a harmonium substituted for the piano; the audience sat on the ground all around; there was no interval and no supper.

Instead of the 800 people we'd expected—two times the most we'd ever played *MC* for—about 2,000 people came. As elsewhere in folk theatre the women and young children sat on one side and the men and older boys on the other. The audience stayed for about 3 of the 4 hours (we began at 7.30); at the end there were maybe 750 people left. Sircar introduced the play and before each scene he outlined its action in Bengali. But we weren't skilled at projecting our voices to such a large crowd; and *MC* isn't the kind of play that can be suddenly shouted. I wrote in my notebook:

> *Aesthetics went out the window. . . . We adjusted our staging and made it broad: telling the story through big actions. . . . We didn't contact this audience so much through our work as simply by our presence. It was a Fair and we were entertainment.*

We cut large sections of scenes 6 and 8, and all of 9 and 10. The morning after the performance I went around Singjole with Saha talking to people. They liked the performance though they didn't understand its language or anything except the barest story outline. "What did you like?" "The songs, the falling, the fighting, the killing. The way Mother tried to save her children. The girl who couldn't talk". But a Bengali director who saw the performance said, "They were being polite. The only reason they didn't bust up the show was because you are white".

Group members found the performance "liberating"—they were free from the restraint that comes when an audience listens closely—they could go as far as possible in physicalizing their roles, and playing with words as sounds rather than as cognitive speech. As I've seen elsewhere spectators felt free to talk among themselves, wander to and from the performance, and pay attention only to what interested them. Peter Brook and Robert Wilson, among others, have experimented with this kind of rhythms—and I've seen it at performances of Chhau, Kathakali, and Ramlila. The performance at Singjole pinpointed the biggest shortcomings of the tour: (1) we didn't play to ordinary people in the cities; (2) the one time we had a popular audience they couldn't follow the play.

My suggestions for future tours: (1) make tickets available free to theatre workers and students training for theatre. These people should see

two or more performances so that they grasp the production at the professional level of techniques. After this close viewing, discussions are held between the visiting artists and the local people; these discussions are followed by workshops; (2) either by extending the run or by direct subsidy at least one-third of the tickets are allocated for poor people at a cost no more than that of a front stall at the movies. Because TPG doesn't use fixed seating the poor, middle classes, and rich will either mix or segregate themselves; (3) TPG must make productions that work visually if we are going to play for non-English speakers. And if we are going to play outdoors to large crowds then either microphones or clear loud speaking must be used. These suggestions are based on the fact that groups like TPG rarely visit India and the exchange must be managed so that both sides get the most out of it.

Before the meetings in Calcutta I made some notes about what kind of theatre I wanted, and my place in it:

> *Problems: (1) How to make a theatre for the poor, the workers, the office people and still survive and still do theatre that is important personally. (2) How to involve the audience at every level and still keep professional standards. . . . I want to get to these things: (1) Performances for "people" on subjects or themes of importance to society—to do these shows free, where "people" are. (2) Experiment with the whole range of what performance is—getting to, doing, going from—and to have performers and audience conscious of and participating in this whole range. It means opening not only rehearsals but pre-show notes and warm-ups and post-show discussions and parties to the audience. (3) Find or invent new kinds of psychophysical, psychosocial, and sociophysical exercises. To advance the knowledge of training—especially breathing and making sound.*
>
> *These meetings are good because they open the possibility for change—even total liberation. For me the liberation can come in two ways: Control over TPG so it is an instrument of mine; or freedom from the Group so I can pursue these experiments on my own. In either case I can get free of the ego struggles. I no longer think the Group must reflect what I hope the coming society should be. I now think the instrument must be sharp and held in strong hands—and when it cuts it ought not cut into itself but into the world around it. Otherwise people will mostly subjectivize their lives, turn on or into each other, fail to do anything more than "express" themselves—while not relating either to the society or to theoretical problems of performance theory, the art. It's the intersection of these two that interests me—not "holding together" a group (whatever its reputation). Reputations come and go, even art passes. But certain theories and social systems abide, if not for all time, for a long time. I want to teach, change the order of society, and have-make fun.*

The meetings took place on 16 and 17 March. The formality of a closed meeting extending over two days guarantees that everyone has a chance to say their say. When the Calcutta meetings were over we knew two things: people other than me would direct and in other ways seek their autonomy (this process began in 1973 with Borst directing *The Beard*), and more meetings were necessary after the tour to find out whether or not TPG should continue as a group and if so, how.

After Calcutta, Bhopal was like emptiness itself. It reminded me of the American southwest and the dry mountains of Mexico. But amid the

feeling of newness was the sense that the trees had been cut down, erosion was clawing the land, gutting it. The organizing for TPG by Ashok Bajpeyi and Satyen Kumar was a model of efficiency. Kumar visited Delhi on 14 February, saw a performance, met with me, Murti, Nath and Awasthi; he filed a report on 16 February that formed the basis of our Bhopal program. Everything was covered, including TPG eating habits. Kumar estimated that our performances would cost Rs. 10,000 of which Rs. 6,000 could be earned at the box office if tickets were pegged at Rs. 10. We set up at the Ravindra Bhawan. To encourage a breeze we left the auditorium open but permitted no one to sit there; we used the outdoor theatre and sloping lawn for scenes 9 through 12. The work at Bhopal went so efficiently that we invited Benu Ganguly, technical director, to come with us to Bombay.

If Calcutta is India's New York, then Bombay is her Los Angeles. All of TPG just slid into Bombay's luxury like falling into velvet. Except for one night at a Tamasha I saw nothing of Bombay's other side. In its segregation of the poor Bombay is very like American cities with their ghettoes and "ethnic" neighbourhoods. The space for *MC* at the CJC School was a magnificent courtyard surrounded on three-sides by galleried buildings. We adapted our environment to the large space making room for 500 spectators, and another 150 (at reduced prices) up in the galleries. I watched some of each show from up top: it was like looking at a terrain map on which figures made dance patterns; the sound rose splendidly so all the dialogue was heard. Everything arranged for us by Narayana Menon and K. K. Suvarna of the National Centre for the Performing Arts was first-rate. The shows were near perfect—we'd learned from Singjole to physicalize a bit more than in America, to speak a little slower, and to eliminate extraneous gestures. The audience understood English and knew Brecht.

On the last night's performance in Calcutta signs appeared in the theatre: "Schechner Has No Right To Destroy Brecht's Epic Theatre". "We Want Brecht Not Environmental Theatre". "Environmental Theatre Is A Deliberate Distortion Of Brecht's Philosophy Of Theatre". "Long Live Bertolt Brecht, The Dramatist Of The People". "Brecht Dealt With War, Schechner Deals With Orgasm". "Schechner Preaches Community Involvement By Making You Pay For It". "Brecht Spoke of Reality And Struggle, Schechner Deals With Gags, Stunts And Sexual Perversion". And on 5 April a review appeared in the (Bombay) *Times of India* that praised the production: "Fantastic! Never before has a Bombay audience been exposed to such an enriching theatrical experience. . . . A summative statement on drama; an unforgettable event. Thrice tears welled up in my eyes. . . . Through it all, through the words and the action and the noise and the novelty and the enormous planning and intellection behind it Brecht's deep humanism emerges. . . . Mother Courage is Man (sic) confronting the absurd. As performed she is vigorous, harsh, pragmatic, tender, defiant, raw as a scoop of earth, ineluctably human". These contradictory estimates of the production raise the same question: Is TPG true to Brecht, and if not, does it matter?

I don't think fidelity matters much, though I do think TPG's *MC* is true to Brecht. Most of the time the author's intentions aren't known. Who's

to say what Sophocles, Kalidasa, or Shakespeare intended? Should Greek tragedies be performed only outdoors in semicircular theatres seating 17,000 spectators who attend as part of yearly civic celebrations? And should these plays be offered up as three tragedies followed by one satyr play? If so, the academies had better instruct us on how to recreate the Athenian city-state. And so on for every past epoch. And if fidelity means the "interior meaning" of a text, then that is obviously a question of interpretation. Even garrulous Shaw didn't say everything about his plays; and most writers are mum. Fidelity is even less important with Brecht because he staged his plays as he saw fit, and left his "model books" as evidence—while urging that these not be slavishly followed. Of *MC* a film exists of the Brecht-Weigel production.

I have long taken the position, and hold it now, that a text is a skeleton, an outline, a plan, a map—but that the body, picture, structure, and territory of a play can be actualized only in performance, at the immediate and unique encounter of performers and spectators; and that rehearsal is a research process for unfolding and discovering what the performance will be. As for "changing the text." there are times when that's good and times when it's bad. A classic text that is in no danger of being forgotten is open to retelling, especially if it is to be translated anyway; also neglected plays that will rarely be done in their pristine form. Actually some of the great plays—Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, many of Molière's plays, Tulsidas' *Ramacharitmanas* (as chanted in Ramlila), not to mention Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*—are versions of older dramas or oral recitations. On the other hand, if a play is new I think the author's words should be respected—he has the right to see his play reach the public first as he wrote it. As a matter of fact, we made no text changes in *MC* except to cut all of scene 4 up to the "Song of the Great Capitulation".

But the objections, and praise, are based not on textual changes but on tone—on a sense that TPG didn't do Brecht as Brecht would have done it; and therefore we did it wrong. *MC* is not one of Brecht's hardline plays like *The Measure's Taken.* It belongs to a later period along with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan.* Written in 1938, premiered in 1939 in Zurich, *MC* is as much an anti-war play as a condemnation of capitalist greed. In the character of Courage, Brecht internalizes the dialectical conflict which breaks Shen Te and Shui Ta into two persons: Courage is both loving and cruel, generous and stingy, wise and stupid, the best humanity has to offer and an animal. At the end she is neither a hero nor a hyena, but both. Brecht's own *MC* production (I've studied the model book and seen the movie) is, if anything, more sentimental than TPG's: (1) the famous open-mouth silent scream of Weigel-Courage when she hears the rifle shots that kill Swiss Cheese but can't express (out loud) her grief; (2) her mourning-lullaby sung over Kattrin's corpse: in Brecht's production Courage allows Kattrin to be buried fully clothed although her clothes are of market-value—in TPG's production we followed the logic of "hyena of the battlefield" (Brecht's description of Courage) to its extreme by having Courage strip the outer garments off Kattrin; (3) the final action of Brecht's production: on a gray, large, empty stage Courage alone lifts

the heavy yoke of her wagon, hitches herself to it, and draws the vehicle two full times around the floor of the revolving stage. I don't criticize Brecht for these choices which point up Courage's humanity, grief, and (pardon) courage; the actions are balanced by others that show her bitterness, contempt, cynicism, and brutality. But I point out that Brecht the director knew different than Brecht the author. Whether different equals better I will not say.

At another level altogether, TPG has been "true" to Brecht the author even when we've differed with Brecht the director. There is no rolling wagon, but instead a store which is more in the American tradition; we serve supper; the final scenes are played outdoors or with the theatre open to the street. We didn't set the play in 17th century Europe in a war between Protestants and Catholics; we use modern costumes and no make-up. We have no separate orchestra playing offstage or from the pit—the performers play the music and all technical people play dramatic roles too. In these ways we out-Brechted Brecht: not only is the work of the theatre shown but theatre workers perform roles; and what is a better *verfrumsdungeffekt* than seeing the performer playing Mother Courage play the flute, or the man playing the Chaplain set the ropes between scenes? These choices were made on the basis of how best to get the play across to our audience, and in terms of an environmental theatre we advocate as thoroughly as Brecht advocated his Epic Theatre. The underlying idea of TPG's production—the actualization of the play's inscape—is the same in TPG as with Brecht: a good woman who, in identifying herself with the industrialists, the capitalists, makes choices against her own class interest (which is lower middle, not rich as she gives herself airs of being). Therefore she is systematically—not accidentally—ground down, defeated, and transformed into an animal pulling her own wagon. She is also a hyena of the battlefield, plundering corpses, selling to both sides, cheating, haggling, saving her own skin at the cost of her children's lives. But through all this, and Brecht knew it, she shows grit, a sense of humor with her wise-cracks aimed unfailingly at the generals, priests, kings, and popes. She has a sense of values consistent with Brecht's: she is cynical about religion and politics; she survives. As in *Circle* and *Good Woman* Brecht shows that the only good person in bad times is a bad person (Azdak); good people must act bad to survive in bad times. What the audience experiences is not a bad person getting worse—there's no educative value in that, and Brecht is fundamentally optimistic—but a good person forced to act bad in order to survive. What the audience learns to condemn is the (capitalist and war-making) system that makes Courage choose between her livelihood and a bribe to ransom her son Swiss Cheese.

The Workshops, The Aftermath

Under USIS auspices TPG ran workshops in Calcutta and Bombay; we also did workshops on our own in Delhi and in collaboration with our sponsors in Bhopal and Chandigarh. Also I gave slide lectures about our work and the films of *Dionysus in 69* and *The Tooth of Crime* were shown. Workshop is the best introduction to TPG—but unfortunately an introduction that can be given to only a few people. There are other difficulties too. Our work is physical but Indian modern theatre workers are not familiar

with—and often are put off by—physical work. I mean simple exertion, as well as self-expression through movement, singing, unstructured sound-making, and touching. Exercises function as vessels—traditions actually—that contain and channel energies, often sexual and aggressive energies (which are normally repressed or redirected). A jumping kick may metaphorize hurting, a deep release of sound and a pelvic thrust may metaphorize sexual intercourse. Unlike traditional forms that already have a grammar (either abstract or mimetic), I try to help performers find in workshop their own mode of expression; later some of these image-actions are used in performance. The workshop is a kind of group socio-psychoanalysis translated into theatrical terms: the space where the personal and the public intersect. I was afraid to go far with this kind of work in India: I didn't want to accept the responsibility of inviting the release of so much repressed energy when I was moving on in a matter of hours. Usually we taught breathing, panting, sound-making, a few of the psychophysical exercises (taken from Kathakali via Grotowski), and played theatre games and/or improvisations. Also a lot of discussion went on during the workshops—it was a healthy place to expound on TPG's work, demonstrate some of it, and invite participation. The deepest workshops took place after the tour when Joan and I could spend more time. In July we worked several times with Sircar's Satabdi. I watched and then participated in Debesh Chakravarty's work with his Epic Theatre. Joan and I exchanged work with The Puppets, directed by Ragunath Goswami in Calcutta. In September we did a five day (6 hours per day) workshop with the NSD Repertory in Delhi. This was very satisfying because the Rep people know each other well, are professionals, and wanted to go as far as they could. In October Joan worked more with them, as well as with students at the NSD.

One of the strangest workshops took place in Chandigarh on 23-4 February. Borst and I went there on the invitation of Balwant Gargi after *MC* performances were cancelled. Gargi had gathered theatre scholars and workers from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and other places to "experiment with the translation of the folk ballad Mirza Sahiban into performing arts terms and the resultant production will be performed in a natural rural setting." The time allotted was 23 February to 20 March. I don't know how it turned out, but it began like Alice's teaparty. Some of the visitors weren't performers; mixed in with them were Punjabi musicians who kept up a steady drumming and chanting behind many of the meetings. Gargi turned over the opening sessions to Steve and me, but I didn't have the foggiest idea what to do. We did standard voice work, warmups, and "line exercises"—where people face each other and exchange gestures, sounds, ways of walking, etc. What bothered me was that on paper Gargi's program read splendidly, but the participants didn't know how to break down the barriers between them—it wasn't their fault, there was no crucible prepared to melt down the divisions. And if Steve and I were supposed to provide the heat we found ourselves as disoriented as the others.

In my letter of 1 August 1974 to the JDR 3rd Fund's Porter McCray applying for the money to take TPG to India I outlined my aims:

The entire Performance Group will participate in this tour. The tour will involve performing in Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay; studying at the Kathakali Kalamandalam in Kerala; observing traditional and ritual performances in various places in India; direct contact with Indian theatre and dance people; workshops and lecture-demonstrations at theatre centers. Along with Group projects several individual projects will also be worked out, including the possibility of a joint TPG-Indian production; various study projects in Indian arts.

Except for Joan and me the last TPG member left India on 21 June. Most of my program beyond the performances, workshops, and lectures didn't happen. After the tour Clayburgh, Kas Self, Joan, and I saw Mayurbhanj, Purulia, and Seraikella Chhau, and studied Seraikella Chhau; later I studied Kathakali, Joan studied Hindustani singing, and we both studied yoga. Clayburgh was going to design a production in Delhi but the project collapsed. Discussions are going on that will bring me back to India to direct in Indian languages with Indian performers. Many Group members thought of staying in India till August, some even longer—so what happened? The meetings at Juhu actually stirred many people to go back to America and begin projects of their own. With me out of the USA until February 1977, time and facilities were available without danger of competition. Then during the tour there wasn't enough time at each center to see Indian theatre or to follow-up initial contacts with Indian theatre workers. We nearly doubled our planned number of performances in order to earn more money and to respond to the great popularity of *MC*. Our sponsors concentrated on making *MC* a success and few arrangements were made for us to see modern, traditional, folk, or ritual performances. The tour got to be a grind, and at the end of it people were sick, exhausted, and worn out. Actually I didn't anticipate how hard being in India would be for some people—at the level of different food, living conditions, lack of family, friends, and familiar diversions. Maybe I expected too much when I outlined my aims; or maybe those aims were mine and not TPG's. But the "corollary items" are in the long run as important as the impact of our performing. I consider this tour a success—but for next time I want to guarantee those items—the joint productions, intensive workshops, experience of Indian theatre, studies—that make a tour more than hit-and-run.