

How did the residency in India come about in a practical sense?

I have some very long-standing Bengali friends, dance ethnologist Ranjita Karlekar who I met in Copenhagen in 1983 and documentary film maker JoJo Karlekar who I met in Calcutta, now called Kolkata, in 1984. Keeping in touch we managed to catch each other at various points around the globe and then in 1993 Ranjita invited Stuart Lynch and I to teach a couple of workshops and then perform both at the Goethe Institute Theatre as well as with Calcutta Social Project. This was a very powerful experience and the idea of 'Embrace' as a longer intercultural exchange came into being sometime after that. However I first managed to return to Kolkata to discuss this with Ranjita and JoJo at the end of 1991 and things gradually began to take form. Ranjita introduced me to a book by Kapila Vatsyayan about The Natyashastra which is a fundamental text within Indian artistic tradition and I was immensely taken by some striking parallels to Body Weather which is the base of our practice. I felt it would be perfect to kick into an exchange by investigating the parallels and divergencies between our philosophy and methods of working and that which underlies much of classical Indian expression. Simultaneously I wanted to start to gather ideas and people as contributors to a performance which brings together both Indian and Australian artists. So yes, we're calling the overall project EMBRACE and it's made up of stages of workshops and performances both in India and in Australia which act as steps towards a culminative performance in 2005/06 which I'm seeing as being an all night installation event, parallel to the old Kathakali performances through the night, marking the passage of time from dusk to dawn.

What are the basic points of contact between the Natyashastra and Body Weather?

The first aspect that creates connection is an emphasis on preparedness in that one trains the body to be ready, to be available to move in any given direction in any speed at any time. This in itself is also a relation to a depersonalisation and to the capacity to transform via the loading of images into the body. The emptying of self anchors down into the origins of performance relative to the divine which is also very visible in the contemporary puja's - religious ceremonies and festivals which we have been following closely. Another aspect is a focus on multiplicity, different parts of the body each having very clearly defined operations simultaneously at different speeds.

However there are also extremely interesting points of divergence. For example, rather than striving towards a fixed form, Body Weather encourages an openended exploration which aims to awaken the intelligence of the body. Although the method is very different, the result can lead somewhere similar and it is definition which is at stake. Body Weather also encourages a strong relation into a foetal sensitivity alongside a fuzzy logic, a blurring which doesn't need to 'arrive' at a sharp definition - instead it is an invitation to a constant state of 'becoming'. Where in the Natyashastra there is a vast structuring and extensive categorisation of mental and emotional states, Body Weather encourages a splay of shades and nuances to emerge through an exploration - where the imagination challenges the body to meet and make tangible divergent streams of sensitivities and images.

How have the Body Weather workshops gone, particularly with the children?

We are about to start our first workshop at the Calcutta School of Music tomorrow. We're told there will be a wide range of participants with ages from around 14 to the mid 50s. Over a period of 10 days we'll be working in the afternoons to introduce the philosophy and method of how we work. Then we'll be doing a second 10-day workshop which will be slightly more intense in that it's longer working hours which will also culminate in a performance installation at Seagull Multimedia & Resource Centre. This will enable us to gauge how both performers and audiences relate to a format of performance which is more akin to an interactive gallery installation rather than a fixed, sit-down experience. We're in the process now of planning both the workshops and performances with the slum children as well as performances for the artisans of Kumurtali who build the clay idols used in the religious processions and whose studios along the riverside are under threat of eviction.

Can you tell us a little of what to expect of 'Embrace' when it comes to Sydney?

Help! Well, given that to date every day is an intense onslaught of colour and texture and smell amidst a wild anarchic bustle and passionate thriving humour in a deeply black, polluted city, we're running constantly on the spot just to keep up. It's the magnificent discordance and defiant skirmishing which imbues every level of life here that is soliciting and formatting our bodies and our thoughts. A bit of a rousing is what we're hoping we'll touch on in Sydney!