

# Nandikar

**Staging Globalisation in Kolkata and Abroad**



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## Nandikar – Staging Globalisation in Kolkata and Abroad



All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players

William Shakespeare

*As You Like It* (1974: 55-6)

Picture: Nandikar's dress rehearsal of the play *Football, Sir* in front.

Front image: The icon is Nandikar's logo and depicts a face, created for the group by film director Satyajit Ray.

## Acknowledgments

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# 1 Introduction

The stage is North Kolkata in West-Bengal, India.

The set is Shyambazaar Street an early winter day.

The characters are a small group of young men and women.

## Scene 1

*Town houses make the landscape, the background against where they are seen. On the pavement outside the town house, with a moulded and painted emblem (as seen on the front page of this thesis) to the right, they stand among a small collection of newly made, unpainted furniture. There is a bed here, a shelf to put in a corner, a small table and a chair. The group is engaged in a discussion concerning what kind of props they need for the shelf and if they have enough painting, when – suddenly – there is a change of topic.*

Susanta: *(In the direction of Jahar, who tampers with a rope attached to a bed)* No – NO!

You are breaking it you moron.

Jahar: *(Facing me, drinking tea (tea) from a small glass)* It needs to be tightened, I know – it is I who am in bed. Find your own bed, no need to be angry with me.

Susanta: *(Addressing me)* I have a few cigarettes. Let us leave this fool *(nodding pointedly at Jahar, smiling)*, smoke and indulge in serious talk about which brand of cigarettes that suite an actor of my class.

Bappa: See? *(Also addressing me)* This is how they behave, always full of nonsense.

Susanta: *(With an even bigger smile on his face, caricaturing Bappa's voice)* This is how they behave, always full of nonsense. Ba!

Sohini: *(Throws a fist full of sawdust at Susanta)* You will never learn to behave. Leave us and do not come back – ever.

Susanta: *(Still with a smile, yawns)* I will do that one day, but the world is not ready for me yet.



## Scene 2

*Inside an unfurnished room of the city house. The young men and women sit along one wall, while three seniors sit under two windows by the opposite wall. Three young men stand to the left of the room, and a young woman named Mithu stands on the right hand side. Silence.*

Mithu: *(Starts to run in slow motion towards the three men, screaming of sorrow. The men receive her with open arms and start to cry while trying to comfort her)*

The eldest senior: *(Facing to two other seniors) Ba! What was that? (The two other seniors lift their shoulders and look uninterested) Did you believe that screaming? Seemed more like a spoiled girl who was denied a third ice cream to me, than a pregnant woman who feels she has lost the possibility of the family she was dreaming of. (Addressing Mithu) Repeat, and now think about your character's situation, you are supposed to act that out.*

Mithu: *(Repeats her entrance, this time screaming a little bit higher)*

The eldest senior: Oh my god! *(Smiles)* Do you think that emotions lay in the loudness of your screaming? *(No answer)* What? Answer me!

Mithu: *(Looks down on her feet, the young men stands silent by her side)* No.

The eldest senior: What??

Mithu: *(Looking towards him, but not into his eyes)* No, I don't think so.

The eldest senior: Take your time; try to find your character's emotions. She is a servant, pregnant with the son of the house and he is unwilling to take any responsibilities, irrespective of the consequences.

Mithu: *(Walks back to the left hand side, and stands with her back to the young men for a minute – the only sound in the room originates from the two fans – turns around and starts walk, runs, emitting a sobbing sound)*

## A Grounded Anthropology of Globalisation

Kolkata<sup>1</sup> is a relative young, but still an old, modern city. It is a British colonial, a Bengali and Indian city, a city where the flows of localisation and globalisation have flooded through the last three centuries. There are aspects of Kolkata, like pollution, rushing lawyers, architecture, Internet cafés, profit hungry traders, photo shops, traffic jams, performances of Ibsen plays etc, that are found in large cities all over the world. At the same time everything is specific to this locality, to Kolkata. And this is not a contradiction. Like Eriksen writes in an essay about “hypermodernity” in Mumbai (Bombay) (Eriksen 1994: 51), it is necessary to understand most (urban) places as both global and local at the same time. In terms of the existence of a plurality when it comes to manifestations of culture, Kolkata was among the first “modern multicultural” cities of the world (King 1995: 114). Britons established Kolkata as a trade post – a *baajaar* (bazaar) – in an area with many Bengali settlements and a few plots of land rented by Portuguese, French and Dutch traders from the Mughal ruler of North India. On the riverbed of Ganga the *baajaars* were many, here was some intersects channelling flows of goods, practises and ideas connecting the interior with the exterior. Not only places can house practises and sites advancing globalisation and localisation, also theatre groups can be seen as constituting practises and sites in the name of modernity where, among many possibilities, globalisation and localisation are among the issues. Nandikar is such a theatre group.

The discussions in this thesis are based on an ethnographic description of a group of theatre activists in a city where globalisation takes place and “is creating new cultural configurations through which people are living out new subjectivities and social relations” (Low 1999a: 11). The activists in question are participants in Nandikar. With their lived engagements as the point of departure, I will approach globalisation and show how central practises and sites can be understood as struggles, disclosures and contemplations by the Nandikar participants of their dwelling in their own time, in their own city. Against this

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<sup>1</sup> On January 1, 2001 the official name *Calcutta* was changed to *Kolkata*.

*mise en scène*, or backdrop, I will approach an anthropology of globalisation that are grounded in the engagements of the people who constitute the field.

This project is a result of the theatre activists letting me into their worlds – their theatre and cityscapes of Kolkata. My ambition is to give a description of some practises and sites produced by the informants through their engagement with theatre both in the metropolis of Kolkata and abroad. I see this thesis as primarily an empirical enterprise, even as the empirical cases are influenced by my theoretical positions – from the time before the fieldwork and as they developed as a result of my engagement with the field. Very generally speaking, a central goal turned out to be giving a description of how globalisation actually is sensible, or experienced and confronted by a group of individuals, on the basis of their engagement with theatre (mainly) in Kolkata – a group of activists who are not *victims* of globalisation. Throughout my fieldwork I used my pre-understanding of the field, my knowledge of method and how to generate data, and some theoretical views, in order to comprehend – in an ordered way – what I have learned and experienced. To me the field and the life of my informants made sense, and this is my adaptation of this experience into an anthropological thesis.

Most studies of globalisation are confined to the (economical) macroprocesses and the general flows in global, transnational scapes (Appadurai 1990; 1996; 2001), which are said *to be* globalisation through its time/space compression of social relations (Giddens 1990; also Harvey 1990). These studies tend to forget that these processes have their sources in human interaction, situated in space and time. That they are actually experienced and related to by other humans. The debates on globalisation are said to have left ordinary people outside and behind (Appadurai 2001), not surprising when most studies of globalisation give few accounts of social life. Humans only becomes interesting when they move across borders in “global and transnational spaces” (Kearney 1995: 547) – like capital, commodities, information and symbols. Globalisation hints at certain forces, movements, and flows transcending the nation-state making an impact on peoples’ social

life across the world .The anthropologist's quest should be to approach these from below, from localised social practises.

One of the most common definitions of globalisation is given by the sociologist Anthony Giddens, who writes that it denotes “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990: 64). The study of which flows and how they become intensified is given pre-eminence, and the focus on the localised constant processes of re-shaping is left out in most publications. This thesis is a support to the call for using globalisation as a framework for interpreting localised social life, and a study of how a group of people relates to the intensification of worldwide social relations and global flows.

## **Introducing Nandikar**

I was together with my landlady's son-in-law, Subhaya, the first time I met some of the participants of Nandikar. He arranged the meeting in advance and seemed even more nervous than I.

From Bidhan Naagar, where I stay, we enter a bus in the swirl of the afternoon rush. After driving through the fumes from an endless row of slow moving cars, passing streets of vegetable vendors and repair shops, we depart the bus 20 minutes later. Subhaya asks some shop-owners for direction and we walk through narrow lanes towards Shyambazaar Street. Entering Nandikar's facilities, Subhaya quickly spots a bearded man who sits just inside the open door in a small office and indicates to me that this is the leader of the group, Rudraprasad Sengupta or Sir as everyone calls him. He talks on the phone. Subhaya bends down and touches Sir's feet with his right hand, then he touches his own forehead and chest with the same hand. A young man asks us to sit on a small three-seater sofa with plastic skin-imitation upholstery and wait until Sir finishes the call. When finished talking, he turns toward me and asks: “What can I do for you?”

I tell Sir about my project. He seems enthusiastic, and starts to talk about the journey of theatre activists and the importance of playfulness. He says that this theatre of Nandikar is engaged in a joint activity through which the participants learn something about themselves as individuals and as a part of a group. It is through the relations between being an individual within a group, and at the same time an organic part of the group, it is possible to learn about life and living, about the major part of the iceberg that is hidden to most people. Soon he also gives me an analysis of the world, India and theatre. He lectures about people who tend to forget history, how cultural values made people starve and die during the colonial ruler-made hunger in 1943, where rich upper-caste people did not share their food with the starving poor, and how everything in India is synthetic and superficial these days. He feels that theatre is given less importance in a world with several competing media. It is hard to reach people who often choose TV since it demands no involvement, it is already in the living-room, and there is no need to travel through the jammed streets of Kolkata in order to engage in theatre. He says he feels sorry for the state of theatre since it consists of a language that could take part in bridging the gaps between people, societies, religions, cultures and nations. Given the chance, theatre has the possibilities of bringing people together on the basis of its physical language which can be made almost globally sensible<sup>2</sup>.

The following day most of the Nandikar participants went to Mumbai for a week to give some performances there. From the time when they returned, and the following 6 months, I learned more about what Sir was talking about and the Nandikar participants' life as theatre activists.

Nandikar is a renowned theatre group in Bengal, among theatre lovers of India and a small, but growing, group of theatregoers in Europe and America. Since its foundation in 1960, the different participants that at any given time constitutes the group have made a journey

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<sup>2</sup> The idea behind this statement is that how it makes sense will vary, but as an art form, a performance will make sense in one way or another since it implies people interacting – in this respect it does not equal Laura Bohannon's reading of Shakespeare (1971). However, the partaker Sir primarily was referring to was those of an educated middleclass.

through adaptations of non-Bengali plays – like Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Anton Chechov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, Bertolt Brecht’s *Three-Penny Opera*, Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Ingmar Bergman’s *Nora* – as well as Bengali plays, poems and epics. A central quest through all these years have been to find good plays that would make it possible to perform sensible, entertaining and engaging theatre.

Although socially committed, Nandikar never proclaimed a political program since most of the original members felt that for theatre to become a changing force in the society, it had to focus on the performative aspects. Through the presentation of good performances, it would make the partakers<sup>3</sup> engage, and thus reflect upon their dwelling (on dwelling see Ingold 2000; Franklin 2002; also Heidegger 1962). Today’s Nandikar is not a purely performance oriented theatre group. With the participants view on theatre as one of the best ways to realise engagement, understanding and responsibility, it has turned towards school children, disabled groups, street dwellers and sex workers. Through workshops they introduce theatre as a tool the participants can use in order to develop as societal persons.

At the time of this fieldwork Nandikar consisted of a core of 13 members between the age of 36 to 65, one of these a woman. The members constitute a democratic organ, which makes all the decisions. Although all of them are acting, several are mainly engaged in administrative work. The leading actors and the directors are all among the proper members. The President of the group for the last 25 years is Rudraprasad Sengupta. He is the leading director, the main translator and adapter of English-language scripts, the organiser with the largest network and an acknowledged actor – in other words the prime mover of Nandikar. In addition to the members, there is a group of about 20 associated members ranging from the age of 21 to 36, of which four are women. An annual in-house workshop aimed to train theatre activists was the introduction to Nandikar for the majority of this group of participants, which is usually labelled juniors and is the main focus of this study. Almost each year since the middle of the 1980s Nandikar have conducted the above

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<sup>3</sup> Following Schechner (2001), I use the term partaker instead of audience or spectator, words that emphasis respectively hearing and seeing.

mentioned in-house workshop to train theatre activists. It is a performance-oriented workshop, and the group of between 15 and 20 trainees are given minor parts in larger productions. Among the trainees there is a larger group of women. It is a Nandikar policy to recruits as many women as possible, since more females than males tend to give up theatre when they grow older and establish a family of their own.

Nandikar rents a small flat in an old part of Northern Kolkata called Shyambazaar. Here the activists have their office and a small room for rehearsals. The group is on the brink of becoming professional and many of the participants (proper members and associated members) spend most of the day working as theatre activists. Payment is based on a combination of seniority, amount of time spent on Nandikar and private financial situation. Everyone gets paid for participating in performances, and four of the juniors also receive a grant from the central government for their theatre studies. Only a limited number receive their sole income from Nandikar. Several have jobs and some of the juniors are students, at least in theory since many of the students shirk the university in order to dedicate themselves fully into the love of their life, namely theatre. This creates a minor conflict of interest among the seniors, who at the same time need a group of juniors who can work with theatre in the daytime, simultaneously as they encourage the juniors to finish their studies and disapprove when they play truant. Aid from their family or household is necessary for the juniors and also families that belong to the lower middleclass are able to support a family member's financially insecure theatrical pursuit. This could perhaps serve as an indicator of the high positions of theatre and art in Kolkata.

### **Day-to-Day Engagements**

A day in the life of the juniors takes them to different places, let them do a wide variety of tasks and, in the end, brings them together. Juniors like Susanta, Subir, Sohini, Bappa, Goutam and Jahar have different upbringings. They live in different parts of the city, they come from families with various backgrounds, they live in multi-stored houses or small single-roomed flats, they have grown up in different neighbourhoods worlds apart, but now they interact with their friends and strangers in a rather similar way. When they start their

career in Nandikar a new process of socialisation begins. Most of them find their best friends within Nandikar, friends they primarily met through their participation in the group's in-house workshop.

While many of the juniors are students like Jahar and Susanta, a few have a job like Subir and Goutam, and a minority is only doing theatre. Nevertheless, about half of the juniors start their work as theatre activists around noon. Some even starts earlier, either to help Sir in the morning with various administrative or practical tasks, or to work on some other assignments they are given in preparation for a new production or a forthcoming tour. Soon after noon most of the various workshops Nandikar are engaged in simultaneously begins. The juniors helping out show up either at Sir's place to go with him, at the Nandikar place in Shyambazaar to go by taxi with other participants or directly at the location of *their* workshop. The various workshops are lead by different seniors, a senior usually work with a given type of workshops for a longer period. Take for instance Debbo-da, he guides Theatre-In-Education (TIE) workshops – a good example is a project in a Bidhan Naagar-based school that have lasted for several years under his direction – and the workshops with sex workers together with Swati-di, the most senior female member. Other seniors can participate in the direction, and there is almost always a group of two to four juniors who help out either through playing music or leading physical exercises. When the workshops finish they head for Nandikar's place to prepare for a new production, to pack the last props, and take them to a theatre hall if they have a performance tonight, or just to do individual rehearsals before the collective rehearsal starts around 7 p.m. The remaining participants of Nandikar turns up well in time before a performance or a rehearsal, making time for both a chat over a glass of *caa* (tea), and the necessary practical or organisational tasks. When the performance or the rehearsal is finished sometime between 9 and 10 p.m. it is time to return home.

During their day-to-day engagements with their seniors and the theatre work in Kolkata or on tour, the participants of Nandikar are introduced into a life where they are forced to continually take stance against their relations to the world they dwell in, and the theatre



activities they are practising. As proclaimed members of the World of Theatre they play their parts within, and in relation to, a self-defined globality. They practise a theatre based on a wide variety of forms, traditions, philosophies, practises and sites. They engage in a journey as societal individuals who together constitute, according to themselves, an “organic” group that I suggest can be labelled modern due to their attitude of questioning the present (Gaonkar 2001), a present where divergent flows of globalisation are seen as major forces affecting social life. Through their theatre they constitute both practises and sites that are active ways of creating a place form where they can perform their parts in making their lifeworlds sensible to themselves and to the others – the partakers of their performances and the fellow passengers of workshops.

## **Outline**

This thesis is organised on the basis of presenting the engagement of the informants as the main focal point in order to make experiences and, effects of globalisation, sensible and grounded.

The following chapter starts with an introduction of the field and the fieldwork before I provide an outline of methods and theoretical position(s). The history and heritage of Bengali theatre and Nandikar are described in the first half of chapter 3, while the remaining half is a description of the organisation of Nandikar and the participants’ main whereabouts. The chapter is concluded with a summarised representation of what can be described as Nandikar’s theatre ideology.

In Chapter 4 one enters the main site of Nandikar’s rehearsals; here the key-informants are introduced at the same time as they are situate within Nandikar’s rehearsal and office space. Within this context, I move on to the next chapter and a description of the main practises taking place in the rehearsal room. A central objective is to show how performative practises, and theories from different parts of the world and the history, are introduced as a mainly implicit part of the rehearsals, as the participants are introduced to the World of Theatre. These everyday practises of the theatre carry the possibility to

transform “the work of imagination” (Appadurai 1996: 9). Globalisation is said to implicate the spatialisation of social theory, and chapter 6 moves beyond the confines of the rehearsal room and into the city of Kolkata. After having portrayed Nandikar as an intersect of various global flows, the city is used to contextualise the activists activities, and as a source of imaginations concerning the relevance of hybrid performative practises. As a point of departure I problematise a common representation of Indian cities concerning the spatial production of space and provides a more complex representation where the Indians also are seen as contributors to the spatial form of the city. In addition to this, the social construction, or the changing attachment of meaning to places and actions within the city, is incorporated. I use the *baajaars* as an example of how a cityscape makes new forms of social interaction possible, social interactions that reverberate in Nandikar’s performative practises. This chapter ends with a description of *Nanden* and The Academy of Fine Art where Nandikar stages most of its performances.

The preceding chapters leads up to Chapter 7 where a description of four of Nandikar’s plays is combined with an interpretation of these as different ways of relating to forces of globalisation, at the same time as they constitute globalising forces in themselves. The final chapter provides a summary of the thesis, and a conclusion where I emphasis the duality, or ambiguity, of the practises described concerning Nandikar’s ways of relating to globalisation. Nandikar participants are influenced by global flows, at the same time as they are agents of globalisation.

## 2 Images and Frames



A Kolkata cityscape

In this chapter, the fieldwork, the methods employed for yielding data and the theoretical propositions I use to interpret the data are presented.

### Data Images

Social anthropology is a comparative study of social life, its goal is to write about, and thus to understand, the different social realities, cultural conditions and manifestations, natural potentialities, etc. people live within and meet across. As plays seldom get translated, but instead adapted, it is a central goal in anthropology to adapt different experiences, practices, sites, patterns of actions of being-in-the-world into a language that either makes comparison possible or the field of study sensible and meaningful to others. My initial plan was to write about formation of identity among theatre workers on the basis of their engagement with the city where they live and work. The reason for choosing a theatre

group as the field of study was the prospect to “go somewhere nice”, which to me often implies theatre, and to limit the field in such a way that I could maintain an interactional approach, at the same time as I accomplished an urban study.

The experiences from two former visits to Kolkata made me make the decision to do fieldwork there, since in Kolkata I found a metropolis with fascinating histories and lives that overwhelmed my senses. My curiosity did not faint as I started to learn more about the city, through talks and books, as *the* Indian centre of intellectual and artistically endeavours. Realising that theatre was felt as an integral part of the city, among both citizens and outsiders, made my choice easy. However, during my fieldwork I realised that the Nandikar participants’ sense of place and belonging were more diverse than I had expected. Yes, the theatre activists of Nandikar belong to *their* Kolkata, but at the same time they experience a sense of belonging to a global World of Theatre.

Realising this, I started to focus on the informants’ activities within, and experience of, both the local and the global. Empirically, it soon became important for me to seek to approach globalisation from below. The main interactions take place among a group of theatre activists. Their performative and engaged interaction with each other, outsiders and at different places became central in order for me to understand how they understand themselves as performers in, and of, their World of Theatre.

## **Fieldwork**

The actual fieldwork in the theatre group was executed during six months between August 2000 and the end of February 2001, and in Sweden for one week in August 2002. It was a rather intense fieldwork with no major breaks. Due to former visits I had a general knowledge of Kolkata. Kolkata was, and still is, reputed for its art scene; including everything from art cinema and *Kalighat pats*<sup>4</sup> to literary little magazines and theatre. The history of Kolkata is ensnaring; it’s a colonial city, an intersect, a modern site where hybrid

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<sup>4</sup> *Kalighat pat* is a Kolkata folk art the Europeans came to know as bazaar paintings. It is paintings done on cheap paper in watercolour, by a community of *patuaas* (*pat*-painters) who settled down in Kalighat in South Kolkata.

aspects are easily experienced on every level of human life and activities. The citizens of Kolkata witnessed globalisation with reference to the plurality and the intensity of connections with different parts of the world through trade before most other cities. In addition, the people of Kolkata are, generally speaking, welcoming, friendly, including and warm hosts.

I lived as a paying guest at the Sains in Bidhan Naagar (Salt Lake City) on the northern fringe of Kolkata, ten to 20 minutes away from Shyambazaar on bus. I had a few rooms to myself, including a kitchen and a bath. The woman of the house, Sipra Sain, was my Bengali teacher during most of my fieldwork and during these lessons she willingly answered all sorts of questions that my living and fieldwork produced. Sipra introduced me to the places to buy inexpensive cloths, good quality silk and excellent sweets, to the buses of Kolkata, to Bengali literature, how many times a day you should take a bath according to the different seasons, and a lot more. Through her cooking skills she also taught me a lot about the Bengali cuisine. Her son gave me directions to good restaurants, helped me when my fluorescent lamp stopped working and shared a cigarette with me when he returned late in the evening from The Telegraph. But most of all he helped me with the translation of the answers from a questionnaire that I used collecting information. The daughter of the house gave me lectures in Bengali traditions concerning *pujas* and weddings. Her own wedding some months in advance paved the ground through photographs and it was her theatre-loving husband Subhya who introduced me to Nandikar in the first place. In the house in Bidhan Naagar I also met the helper Githa who made sure that I had clean cloths, dishes, cups and floors and that I practised my Bengali. In the end of my stay a young boy named Apu was employed to help Sipra out in her daily tasks and making sure that she did not have to stay alone in the house during the nights when her son was working at the newspaper. I also inherited a friend from my Bengali teacher in Norway, Arild E. Ruud, Emanul Haqu. He became my dearest friend outside Nandikar. He offered me a place among friends where I could relax completely. He also introduced me to the Bengali village-side, through inviting me to his parents' place in a village north of the city of Bardhaman (Burdwan) during the Muslim festival Id-ul-Fitr. Emanul made me participate

in the first demonstration against beauty contests in Kolkata and various other events in defence of Bengali language and culture. Through his many activities he introduced me to a lot of people, who all wanted to talk to me and discuss whatever topic I, or they, felt like.

However, I spent most of my time with the theatre group. With the acceptance of Rudraprasad Sengupta and the other activists of Nandikar I was able to participate in almost every aspect of the group's whereabouts. The Nandikar activists, the friends of Nandikar in and outside the city, all became good and close friends. They made my stay pleasurable and rich, and created a place for me where I could do my fieldwork and gain experiences that could be adapted into data.

## **Method – General Modes of Yielding Data**

Method in anthropology is defined as a general mode of yielding data (e.g. interviewing, participation) and to make particular methods effective one deploys specific methods or techniques like questionnaires, shorthand and kinship notations (Ellen 1984: 9). The unique anthropological way of generating specific anthropological knowledge is said to be participant observation (Holy 1984) and it is not a method as such but rather a:

combination of methods and techniques that [...] involves some amount of genuinely social interaction in the field with the subjects of study, some direct observations [...], some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing, some systematic counting, some collection of documents and artefacts, and open-endedness in the direction of study tasks (McCall and Simmons 1969: 1 in Holy 1984: 17).

While the catchwords still are participant observation, within a more interpretive oriented anthropology concerned with meaning, the stress has been changed to the researcher that observes while participating fully in the lives of the informants. This is a procedure that defines the researcher as an observing participant (Holy 1984: 28-9). Participation thus becomes the main method to gather knowledge in order to comprehend a world constituted by meaning through the experience of making your interactions meaningful to others. Participant observation has therefore been “seen as combining survey interviewing, document analysis, direct observation and observer participation” (Denzin 1989: 327).

Employing multiple methods on diverse empirical sources in an attempt to develop participant grounded interpretations implies some sort of triangulation; even when quantitative data is not extensively used. Through a fieldwork triangulation is usually applied on various levels; in the search for different sources of information that bear upon events under analysis (data triangulation), knowledge generated through several methods like participation, interviews and texts (methodological observation) and, ideally, through the awareness of the multiple ways in which the phenomenon may be interpreted (theory triangulation) (Denzin 1989).

To briefly recapitulate, participant observation can be seen as the collective term for methodological triangulation with an emphasis on participation as a means to transform experience into data (Ellen 1984). Hence, to capture the everyday engagements of my informants as theatre activists in order to learn about their priorities, it is essential to engage in as many of their whereabouts as possible, and search for different sources/fields of data. From hanging around, drinking *caa* and chatting about trivialities and interviews, through helping out in a little administrative work such as writing e-mails and practical tasks such as painting props, to watching and participating in rehearsals, see the performances and workshops, read the scripts, participating in a play and learn about the life backstage when the stage curtain is open and the partakers responding and travelling home together after a first night show. Everything constitutes important parts making it possible to learn what the informants' activities are all about and to make interactionally grounded choices when it comes to yielding data – selecting the central concerns of the analysis and interpretation. In addition to know the actual living of informants through engagement (Delaney 1988), it is necessary to know the locations where they dwell and it all takes place – their histories and their connotations – and at least a part of the traditions – practical and philosophical, popular and elite – the informants relate to.

### **Kinds of Data**

I gathered various kinds of data for various purposes. Firstly, to get a general understanding of the informants and their lifeworld, concerning a few topics that I paid

central concern due to my research goals. Secondly, on the basis of this understanding, to search for more specific data in order to interpret (inter-)actions, reported experiences, attitudes, representations, etc. that I found central within Nandikar. This does not imply that I had no idea of what I was going to do before I reached the field, but it emphasises the need of open-mindedness and open-endedness that is necessary when the field is not totally known. In order to achieve this, I sought mainly three types of data: 1) Participation or interactional data concerning how to perform or interact, as means to understand what actions, relations or practises actually mean and how their world make sense to the activists. To be part of a play can illustrate this. As an actor among other actors one is able to participate backstage, one gets different tasks to perform beyond making sure that one is ready to play the part. Tasks such as changing sets, making sure the right props are in place and taking care of the main actors as they enter and leaves the stage. Participation makes one experience and sense what it actually means to be a senior (hierarchy), which attributes an actor that also have to do the backstage work is required to posses and which part of the play that arouses most interest among the actors off-stage. 2) Observational data like who interacts with whom, when and were, the plays with their use of space, gestures, sets, lights, etc., architectural and (urban) morphological characteristics. What shall be considered data and what they mean are mainly conditioned on the basis of participation, through which one supposedly learn something about the priorities and meaning ascribed by the informants. 3) Documentation data, the main ones being books and leaflets originating from Nandikar, newspaper stories, interviews and reviews, book entries, photographs (of sets, places, rehearsals and plays) along with recorded songs and plays. In addition, a group like Nandikar possess a lot of documentation on its own activities, documentation that is often only revealed when you have become familiar and again participation becomes the main practise in order to disclose yourself (naively speaking – honesty is important) as someone to be trusted.

I was always seen with a small notebook in which I wrote scratch-notes (Sanjek 1990) and made simple drawings whenever I could “step out” of participation. Most of the interviews, the sound from a few plays and rehearsals, were recorded on a minidisk. When



I arrived home to Bidhan Naagar, I wrote lengthy descriptions of the day's events. On a regular basis I organised the descriptions and wrote fieldnotes based on different topics. In addition I kept a personal diary where I wrote down my joys and frustrations and spontaneous whims.

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected through a range of different, yet "traditional" means. Among all the regular and not so regular participants of Nandikar that were my informants, a smaller group can be termed key-informants consisting of seven juniors and five seniors, each group with one female. I visited all but one of the key-informants at their homes and got to know them as more than just theatre activists. With reference to the variation in age and gender, they represent the group as a whole fairly well, but there is a small over-representation of those with higher rank within the group (a fact not necessarily corresponding with age and gender, but this is a topic in chapter 3).

During the first weeks of the fieldwork I merely observed the activities and learned to know the informants. My continuous presence made it possible for the informants to let me participate in several different activities and contexts. From bringing *caa* (a few times, I was primarily, after all, a guest), representing Nandikar with flowers when another group had a première, paint parts of a set, act a small role; give a short speech at a children's theatre function, sew medallions on a police officer costume, spend the morning at Sir's place helping out with some of the correspondence, to sell souvenirs to the partakers before, during and after a performance and give Sir hand massage while driving home. Participation led to informal encounters in-between the organised activities throughout the days. There were talks, chats, gossip and discussions by the *caa-dokaan* (tea shop) 15 meters away, and out of sight, from Nandikar's place. On the way to the bus stop at around 10:30 p.m. after a days work, on the bus home discussing the events of the day or while working in the backyard of the theatre painting the props and all kinds of intervals. During these informal talks, I was not only able to ask them about things I had not understood and about their feelings, experiences or opinions concerning topics relevant to my studies, but I

also learned about their interests, priorities in life, and concerns. Through discussions about particular rehearsals, each other's performances and whereabouts, the latest movie or a history someone heard Sir tell, I found perhaps the best source of information.

With some of the most senior members I made recorded interviews about the economical and organisational details, their affiliation to the group and their experiences of, and views, on theatre. The interviews took a set of topics and questions as its starting point, but were open-ended. The different contexts in which the interviews were accomplished (time and place, if there were anyone present and if so who, which referential frames were established between the interviewees and me, etc.) were noted and considered during analysis (Briggs 1992). This provided important insights into what kind of theatre they taught the juniors. I was able to distribute a questionnaire (three pages) in English and Bengali to 28 of the 32 members of the group, of which I received 18 back. In addition, I carried out interviews structured by the questionnaire with three additional members.

I obtained extensive material from nine of the plays (photos, drawings, notes and some playscripts) and their respective sets (photos and drawings). Members of Nandikar have also published books on theatre education, they make souvenirs to each play and the annual National Theatre Festival and they have recorded some music which they distribute on cassettes. The Director of the group initiated a four-year research project in collaboration with The Indian Council of Social Science Research on *The Socio-Economic Context and Significance of Alternative Theatre Movement in West Bengal* (Sengupta 1984). It is still not published due to lack of grants, but was made available to me. Since Nandikar is a rather famous group and several of the members are celebrated and known actors and directors it is part of the public art scene in Kolkata, and to a certain extent the rest of India and the world. Interviews, portrait articles and reviews are published, in addition to books on (contemporary) Indian theatre where the group is usually mentioned. Social discourses are also embedded in these writings. Both as they are *consumed*, like in adapting a play to the stage, literature performed, and the readings of Ibsen's Peer Gynt followed up by a discussion, *produced* like souvenirs as a presentation of "who we are",

and as “independent” sources for analogical comparison, like in reviews exposing another experiences and imagined worlds (Archetti 1994).

Doing urban fieldwork, I also paid attention to how spaces have become a spatial template of urban symbolic communication (Low 1996: 401). Concerning the spatial aspects, focusing on the activists relations to globalisation made more sense when Nandikar was invited to give two performances in Sweden. This experience gave me the knowledge of Nandikar from a foreign site, in addition to the West-Bengali ones I already knew. However, due to the limited time of the fieldwork in Sweden, it is difficult to label my fieldwork as truly multi-sited (Marcus 1995, 1998).

Hierarchy connected to caste is the privileged form of sociality problematised and studied in India; it is the gatekeeping concept for the entire area (Appadurai 1986b; also Gupta and Ferguson 1997). While there is no doubt that caste, as the four *varnas*, still matters, one effect of the status given to it by anthropologists is “a kind of reverse Orientalism, whereby complexity, literacy, historical depth, and structural messiness operate as disqualifications in the struggle of places for a voice in metropolitan theory” (Appadurai 1986b: 357). In addition to this, I did not experience *varna* as a central issue concerning the topics I set out to study. Consequently, hierarchy connected to *varna* is not discussed in this thesis.

Another gatekeeping concept of anthropology of India is *jati*, the organisation of people according to their inherited occupancy. In chapter 6 I discuss the (lack of) importance of *jati* in connection to the social production of social space in Kolkata. Hierarchy however, does matter within the group, but then in connection to accumulated prestige concerning ones abilities to act and knowledge of theatre, in addition to age. This will be mentioned throughout the thesis, and especially in chapter 4.

It should be mentioned that the majority of the participants of Nandikar are from the upper-*varnas* and are either Brahmins or Kshatrias, still participants from the lowest *varna* are also given high prestige within the group. According to my experience there exists no correlation between either *varna* or *jati* and the prestige given within Nandikar. All present

day participants are born Hindus. Most of them describe themselves as religious to various extent and a few are proclaimed atheists.

### **Language**

Knowledge of the local language is expected of an anthropologist (Ellen et.al. 1984: 178-87) and useful in a multitude of different ways. Before the fieldwork I achieved some basic skill in Bengali as a student of Arild Engelsen Ruud (average two hours, one day a week for three months) During the first four months of the fieldwork I learned Bengali from Sipra Sain (average two hours, 3 days a week). My Bengali skills were rudimentary and a better mastery would have been an advantage. However, the ability to utter and understand some everyday sentences and words makes it easier to get around, to understand plays, what the topic of today's rehearsal is and follow when the informants are talking to each other.

To be in the process of learning their language proved useful as an approach to obtaining information (ibid.). Through their willingly teaching I learned a lot about their conceptualisation of theatre and living in general, since a simple question concerning the Bengali name of any given practise (from weddings to funerals, from rehearsals to philosophies of theatre), a theatrical term or the meaning of names given to persons or places often resulted in talks concerning the given issue. At the same time an elementary knowledge of Bengali meant that I could gather (simple) written and oral information without the constant help of the informants, information I later could ask them to elaborate on. In addition, they often, spontaneously, quoted songs and parts of a play, since they knew I could understand some of the words and together we could translate it.

All of my informants know English, from the level of making simple conversation to the that of being a Professor in English literature. Since most of my informants know far more English than I Bengali, most of the interviews were done in English.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Through a project that results in a thesis, the involved people get fixed as new representations they might not feel comfortable with. Openness about the project and to make sure that the informants know the fieldworker's intentions is important to minimise this. My field of study consisted of educated people, who in various degrees understood my role as a social anthropologist at fieldwork. I planned to make the juniors anonymous, but changed my opinion when I had finished the thesis, since I have not written anything that might leave them in a bad light. In addition, Nandikar is such a small and transparent group that everyone would know who I referred to even when using fake names. The seniors are not anonymised since they fully realised what I was doing and approved the use of their proper names. And, due to their relative fame, it would have been totally impossible to make them anonymous since they wanted me to use the name of the group in the thesis. However, some of the presented cases are constructed on the basis of several different stories and experiences to make them more pointed, when so is the case I use the name Anil.

Another problem is connected to essentialising both the field and its context through the presentation of, for instance, the field as Indian and not one among divergent examples of India. Culture is unevenly distributed (Falk Moore 1993) and it is important to understand practises and places as socially and culturally created, but individually experienced in many different ways (Rodman 1992). I have attempted to solve this problem through not attempting to write a thesis on a civilization, I describe and interpret the engagements of the participants of a theatre group. The group displays their own experiences of living in Kolkata, West Bengal, India and the World from their point of engagement.

## **Theory Frames**

The focus of my study changed during the fieldwork as a result of me learning what was central to my informants when the topic was social identity forming practises. I learned fast that they experienced themselves as part of a World of Theatre and, in addition, that they based their theatre on a wide variety of performative practises and theories from "all

over the world”. Nandikar performs outside Kolkata and West-Bengal, in other cities of India, in the neighbouring country Bangladesh. It has also been on a few tours to “the West” and this intensifies the *ras* (flavour) of globalisation. In addition, I soon learned that the plays the participants stage as a rule, rather than exception, have as a central aspect an inquiring discourse concerning their experiences of a present where globalisation is seen as a central force. Consequently, my informants’ experience of being part of, and dwelling in, a World of Theatre, combined with their strong urge to relate to the (past and) present flows of globalisation in its many facets, became a critical concern. This focus demands some theoretical frames in order interpret and adapt a few central images of Nandikar into a social anthropological thesis that discloses<sup>5</sup> for comparison and critique.

To display the attempt to capture my informants’ whereabouts and my own position, globalisation, performative practises and the urban locality are all central themes that need a more detailed presentation. Even as these largely will be presented as overlapping fields, I will discuss them separately. Since my emphasis in this thesis is on Nandikar’s engagement with globalisation, in addition to an understanding of this engagement as a predominantly modern practise, the first and most important frame will be that of globalisation and alternative modernities. The next frame is an elaboration of theatre as a set of (performative) practises of engagement. Thirdly, the urban place where this thesis takes place and the theatre as constituted and constituting sites for the practises are reviewed. These frames are presented also in order disclose the theoretical background of some of the central concepts I apply and the contexts to the discussions of thesis. Since most of this discussion also is grounded in my fieldwork – in the empirical findings – the arguments are elaborated throughout the thesis as well.

When a central concern is globalisation, the *real life* descriptions often get lost in the overall, macro images. It is my view that not being able or willing to take different

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term *disclose* literally, signifying allowing to be seen or making known. My use of the term is inspired by Heidegger, to whom it signifies “to lay open” (1962: 105), and thus “made explicit to our awareness by further analysis” (ibid. translators comment).

experiences of a group of individuals as one of the more important departure points when discussing globalisation equals an attempt to “stage Hamlet without the Prince” (Geertz 1973: 109) and then “the performance” becomes anything but sensible and grounded.

## **The Globalisation Frame**

Terms like globalisation and modernity are, preferably, double grounded in experiences of the field and theoretical perspectives. Thus, I here discuss the theoretical frames the terms and the empirical story are presented within as briefly as possible. In order to do this, I present and criticise a few general views on globalisation. On the basis of this I advocate a view of globalisation, defined as accelerated hybridisation that is a condition of divergent modernities, defined by a practise of questioning the present.

## **Globalisation in Short**

Words like globalisation and modernity are intended to both describe and explain aspects of social life. They have all descriptive uses as well as theoretically framed analytical ones; one use creates implications for the other. The social scientific, including the anthropological, focus on globalisation and modernity can be given a long history, but only in the last two-three decades they have become influential paradigms. Of the discourses on globalisation and modernity it is the former that currently is dominating (Featherstone and Lash 1995) and often is modernity discussed in relation to globalisation (ibid; Giddens 1990).

As previously mentioned, one of the most referred definitions of globalisation is from Giddens who defines it as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (1990: 200). The emphasis on the spatial is present and this is perhaps the most important aspect of using globalisation as a perspective in the interpretation of social life. Discourses on globalisation have in fact been described as representing “the *spatialization* of social theory” (Featherstone and Lash 1995: 1). To Giddens globalisation is a consequence of modernity (1990, 1991), but this is a highly contested view that is said to undermine the spatial aspects (Featherstone and Lash 1995:

3-4). I agree with Jan Nederveen Pieterse who says “the ‘intensification of worldwide social relations’ presumes the prior existence of ‘worldwide social relations’, so that globalisation is the conceptualisation of a *phase* following an existing condition of *globality*” (1995: 48). Giddens’ modernity is both a historical epoch and an attitude born out of Europe (1991: 14-5). Robertson is one who makes globalisation a condition of (divergent) modernisation (1995), and in this view the European modernity becomes a reaction to contact with non-European peoples. In this way modernity hints towards a reflexivity concerning who one is as a person and a society through the dichotomy between “us and them” (resembles Giddens high or late modernity (1991: 3, 20)).

Common ways within anthropology to discuss globalisation – be it as a process where the centrality have been on heterogenising or homogenising, the particularistic or the universalistic, the divergent or the convergent processes, has been to focus on consumption (Friedman 1994) and the cultural biography/social life of things (Kopytoff 1986, Appadurai 1986a). Even as the literature on globalisation is extensive, there is an overall lack of approaches that make individuals and groups of individuals important actors, especially when the persons in question are not portrayed as victims. When globalisation is the issue it often becomes “the central concept” (Robertson 1990), and many discussions circle around topics such as whether it is a homogenising or heterogenising process (Appadurai 1996: 32). The individuals of the world are taken for granted; all *the others*’ situated experience gets neglected and the only experiences we get exposed to are mainly those of the theorist.

### **Globalisation as Hybridisation**

I will advocate a view of globalisation as an analytical term and as a topic giving pre-eminence to accelerated hybridisation due to an intensification of worldwide social relations, and as a way to overcome the use of nation-states, the society or narrowly situated culture manifestations as a framework for interpreting social life. Such a view is a consequence of an urge to incorporate “the others” lifeworlds within social theory, and thus “privilege the spatial over the temporal mode of analysis”(Featherstone and Lash



1995: 1). This is common within social anthropology where the emphasis for a long time has been on synchronic rather than diachronic studies in order to make comparative studies of social life from different locations more plausible. However, this does not imply that globalisation has always been a topic to anthropology. Making globalisation the topic refers to accepting flows of information, institutions, concepts, traditions, images, money and the like on an inter-state, or inter-society, level as important forces or constituents in peoples life.

To define globalisation as accelerated hybridisation implies that hybridisation is a process that (always) has existed and that essentialism is something that must be overcome. The concept of hybridity here refers to cultural syncretism, anti-essentialism, mixture and pluralism<sup>6</sup>. It highlights the fact that “all human societies are, to varying degrees, in crucial intercourse with other societies” (Eriksen 1993, from website). Concepts like “third culture” (Featherstone 1990) as the outcome of global(ising) flows denote the existence of a set of former pure “first cultures” which together merges into something new. To view globalisation as an intensification of hybridisation is meant to introduce an understanding of culture manifestations as already hybrid. Globalisation as a theoretical frame in this view is anti-essential, undermining the relevance of centre-periphery models and it accepts that global flows can have both homogenising and heterogenising aspects. But more importantly, every site have its specific cultural manifestations, even as these only can be described and interpreted with reference to globalisation, or trans-society events.

The concept of intensified hybridisation does not deny the occurrence of both “cultural integration and cultural disintegration processes “ (Featherstone 1990: 1). Globalisation resulting in a spread of choices of new ways to organise or institutionalise – the spread of the idea of the nation-state is a widely used example – is a possibility within this perspective. However, this do not imply that Indian nationalism primarily was/is a function

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<sup>6</sup> Another conceptualisation of hybridity is provided by Gyan Prakesh, who discuss hybridisation as “dissemination, dislocation, and the undoing of founding oppositions entailed in their very establishment; [that...] seeks to highlight cracks and fissures as necessary features of the image of authority” (1996: 80).

of stimulus and response – a learning process through which “the Indian elite responded to the institutions, opportunities, resources, etc. generated by colonialism [...because of their...] expectation of rewards” (Guha 2000: 1-2). This view is usually opposed by an approach that promotes the Indian elite as it fought altruistically against the colonisers and for the people (a similar approach is presented in Ulf Hannerz’ description of the *bhadraloks* (Western educated elite) of Calcutta in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1992: 182-92)). However, these two common approaches fails to acknowledge the contributions “made by the people *on their own*” (Guha 2000: 2), that is all the different struggles made across India by others than individuals like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. What the concept of hybridisation does, is to remind us that even the concept of the nation-state is not a non-hybrid outcome of a single process in a given place at a certain time. At the same time it stresses the complex and divergent process of implementation of form in the new location. Another example is mass media turning global, where particular TV programmes and advertisements are said to be made acceptable through a breaking down of national cultures by transnational corporations (Schlesinger 1989 in Featherstone 1990: 10). The problem is that the responses to these uniform packages of information are anything but uniform (Featherstone 1987; 1990: 10). The flows through mediascapes enhance and intensify differences, or at least make them more visible, at the same time as it creates common points of reference across wide stretches of space. Also the World-System-theoriser Hannerz has emphasised that globalisation implies hetrogenisation; in an elaboration of his *world culture* he writes that this means an “organization by diversity rather than a replication of uniformity” (Hannerz 1990: 237).

To focus on hybridisation results in both historical depth and wider perspectives (concerning the multitude of present practises) enforcing reflexivity on behalf of the writer since it denies the existence of *first cultures* or “cultural islands” (Eriksen 1993) and the conceptualisation of one society, one culture as a unified set of practises. Globalisation processes are complex, and they constitute multiple levels of integration and disintegration, of conjunctures and disjunctures. A single focus on either universalistic or particularistic consequences fails in pinpointing this. The concept of globalisation is not applied in order

to theorise the "*the concrete structuration of the world as a whole*" (Robertson 1990: 20), but to comprehend social life as it takes place within and engages with the junctures and disjunctures of different scapes (Appadurai 1990). The world-as-a-whole is as much a lifeworld as the village and the forests of the Baktamans of New Guinea, despite of its connotations of representing the world-as-it-is. Different conceptions of "the globe" exist and each of the particular globalist projects "comes into being both as a set of commitments and as a set of practises" (Tsing 2001: 187). The World of Theatre can be understood as such a globalist project.

### **Globalisation and Alternative Modernities**

Globalisation is also a framework giving pre-eminence to a focus on intersects as important constituents in creating modern practises and sites. Modernisation denotes the divergent processes through where/which alternative modernities are practised. Modernisation is a result of contact, of different forms of globality (Pieterse 1995), where globalisation in the name of imperialism initially played an important part. The main practises that constitute modernities are those which implies a discourse-like questioning of the present (Gaonkar 2001). It is a framework giving pre-eminence to a focus on practises that implies an active way of relating to the present in any given locality; it is an attitude of engagement. Much of Nandikar's theatre is about questioning or taking stances towards different aspects of globalisation as an important force of the present. Like many other art forms, the attitude of questioning the present is a constituting component in a plurality of performative practises. This attitude of questioning the present is central in defining modernity as an interpretative concept (Gaonkar: 2001). This attitude or practise can have a multitude of alternative forms. Within every nation-state and society different practises will constitute the local modernity according to what the present means to them; traditional ways of social engagement, communication practises etc. Consequently, even as the topic is modernity as a given attitude or practise, in order to capture the divergent practises, it is seen as more correct to talk about "alternative modernities" (Gaonkar 2001).

This does not imply that the Western discourse on modernity should be forgotten, as Gaonkar state, “[modernity] has travelled from the West to the rest of the world [...] also as a form of discourse that interrogates the present [...] and one] cannot escape the legacy of Western discourse on modernity” (2001: 14). It is necessary to have this in mind when one sets out to provincialise “Western” modernity and pluralise the experiences of it. In this way modernisation is, in itself a hybrid configuration within the “Western” discourse, a globally *distributed* form of discourse that have resulted in a multitude of new forms and practises that do not follow the logic(s) of Western modernisation (Gaonkar 2001: 16), there cannot be an acultural theory of modernisation (Taylor 2001: 179).

In order to comprehend and utilise this, it is necessary to approach modernisation from site-based studies, something that in itself is part of spatialising theory and making globalisation a central framework. It is not strange that the modernity of Nandikar implies questioning globalisation, which historically denotes the same processes that conditioned modernisations. Modernisation in this definition is not simply an example of “glocalisation” (Robertson 1995), a set of local dis-embedded practises that are re-embedded in new localities, it is mainly an analytical term denoting responses to contact on an extra-group level. I thus understand modernity as an aspect of globalisation, since globalisation has intensified the points of contact in such a way that it affects large groups of people in a wide variety of ways on an everyday basis. This does not mean that alternative modernities have not enforced the processes of globalisation in a dialectically way. In fact, with Nandikar this is the case. I will show how a modern attitude practised by Nandikar makes the activists a globalising force. Globalisation brings forth many different “cultural” flows, and to relate to any of this in an active way is what I analytically conceptualise as constituting a modernity.

To talk in terms of alternative modernities (Gaonkar 2001) is to spatialise social theory the way the globalisation framework of interpretation of social life demands. The notion of

postmodernity<sup>7</sup> in this respect can be seen as primarily a local (“Western”) comprehension and recognition of “the fact that modernity today is global and multiple and no longer has a governing center or master-narratives to accompany it” (Gaonkar 2001: 14, see also Robertson 1990: 17).

It must be emphasised that globalisation and modernity are terms often used by the informants of this thesis; they have an *emic* use with no single definition. Nandikar is conditioned by globalisation and represents an alternative modernity relating to the present flows of globalisation in the name of consumerism, Americanisation, communalism, global mass-media influences and the resistance towards historical shallow renunciation of local traditions on the altar of global trends. To understand the various responses towards globalisation outside a theoretical framework of globalisation is, as this thesis is set to display, inadequate.

The discussions of globalisation is in itself “generated from within a particular time and place and practice” (Featherstone 1990: 11; also Fog Olwig 2001), and it is my conviction that when one deny the relations, voices and experiences of the others visibility in the discussions the result is merely an elaborated projection of the debater trying to transcend his/her armchair. In an essay titled “What is Performance Studies Anyway?” Richard Schechner gives a foundation of performance studies, that would fit my position concerning the importance and use of globalisation: Performance studies, Schechner writes, “assumes we are living in a postcolonial world where cultures are colliding, interfering with each other, and energetically hybridizing. [It] does not value ‘purity’” (1998: 360).

### **Going Global with the Local**

“An important nature of theatre [practises] is that it is always local and must be local”, writes McAuley (1999: 11) and places theatre as an inherent different branch of dramatic

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<sup>7</sup> The actual meaning of postmodernism is hard to define. According to Featherstone a recent dictionary entry declares: “This word has no meaning. Use it as often as possible” (1988: 195).

arts with reference to television and film. As both a local and located phenomenon, theatre is given its strength in “these days of mass media manipulation” (ibid.). Even so, performative practises – be it rituals, games or theatre – are found in every society and many of these forms of practises have entered global flows. Take one of the founders of modern dance in America and Europe, Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968). She saw “Indian dancing” in the “Hindu Village” in residence at Coney Island outside New York. What St. Denis saw was vaguely connected to Indian *sadir nac*, itself related to ritual temple dancing later reconstructed in India as *bharatanatyam* as *the* traditional Indian dance. The Coney Island experience propelled St. Denis on a path that led to a revolution in modern dance (Schechner 2002: 74). The Orient has inspired the Turkish scenes in Molière, Voltaire used Chinese elements and Sanskrit drama interested Goethe and conditioned the structure of *Faust* (Carlson 1996: 80). Brechtian theatre and its conceptualisation of alienation inspired a lot of Bengali theatre (see chapter 3). *Noh*, a strictly codified traditional Japanese performance system, has influenced playwrights like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats and triggered interaction on many levels between *noh* and “Western” modern theatre (Bethe and Brazell 1990). Jerzy Grotowski explored the connections between rituals and theatre; he synthesised rituals from several cultures through bringing traditional performance specialists from Colombia, Korea, Bali, Taiwan, Haiti and India into his workshops (Schechner 2002). Peter Brook produced a theatre version of the Indian epic Mahabharata with actors from nineteen nations in his search for a transcultural theatre, “whose goal is ‘to articulate a universal theatre, that transcends narrow nationalism in its attempt to achieve human essence’” (Carlson 1996: 89). Also within India the flows of artistic inspirations have collided and amalgamated, something the art historian Hugo Munsterberg stress: “for many of the finest Mughal paintings were executed by Hindi artists working at the Islamic courts, while outstanding Islamic artist found employment at the courts of the Hindu rulers” (Chakravarty 1998: 21).

The examples are numerous (Pavis (ed.) 1996) and indicate the necessity of applying globalisation as a framework for understanding (contemporary) American, European and Indian theatre because of the “ever-increasing web of international connections and

exchanges” (ibid: 81). The combination of being locally situated and part of globalising flows paves the ground for making performance an important approach in order to comprehend and conceptualise globalisation as sensible on the basis of a group of individuals’ experiences. Dealing with these practises and the way they are related in different contexts in space and time, theatre as member of a sphere – or as “flows” in a “scape” (Appadurai 1991) – is an alternative and very exciting way to approach globalisation and the global/local nexus. Now I want to turn to performance, and elaborate this concept.

## **The Practise Frame**

The practises that constitute the central concern in this thesis are primarily seen *as* performative and many of them *are* performative. The main practises that I examines is those in connection to workshops/rehearsals and the performances of plays, since it is the informants living as theatre activists outside and inside the public sphere that is the field of this thesis. In the junctions between localisation and globalisation Nandikar’s theatre are established and this is the departure point in the following theoretical elaboration of performance and theatre.

## **On Performance**

The term performance is defined broadly by Erving Goffman as:

all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. [There is a] pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented and played trough on other occasions (1971 [1959]: 26-7).

According to this definition performances is made of “twice-behaved actions [...], performed actions that people train to do, that they practise and rehears (Schechner 2002: 22) – be it in everyday life as play, sport, politics and dating or in the making of art like in theatre. This implies a focus on sequences of actions that are learned or socialised and repeated within any given socio-cultural group. However, it is important to remember that “there is no original until the copy is operative” (Phelan 1998: 9). Anything can be studied

as performance from books and paintings to cooking and rituals, but that do not mean it *is* a performance:

Something *is* a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition says it is. [...] There is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being a performance (Schechner 2002: 30).

Both in contemporary India and Europe *naatak* (theatre) *is* a performance. Performance studies as an academic exercise is primarily to study practises *as* performances and often *is* these practises performances. This exercise – in itself a practise that can be interpreted *as* a performance and that, to some, *is* a performance – have been described as the result of “bringing [...] theatre and anthropology together [through] the found collaborations between Richard Schechner and Victor Turner” (Phelan 1998: 3).

Victor Turner is the single most important social anthropologist when the topic is theatre or, more precisely, performances. From studying rituals (1995 [1969]) and social dramas (1974) he turned towards performances and performative traditions as his main concern (1982, 1990). To Turner a performance is “the proper finale of an experience” (1982: 13), “an act of creative retrospection in which ‘meaning’ is ascribed to the events and parts of [any given] experience” and a “restored experience” (ibid: 18). The concept of experience is taken from the early hermeneutist William Dilthey’s (1833-1911) philosophy of *Erlebnis* (what has been *lived* through (ibid: 12)) and signifies “a journey, a test (of self, of suppositions about others), a ritual passage, an exposure to peril or risk, a source of fear” (ibid: 18). And such a *living trough* or experience is by Turner seen as incomplete unless one of its *moments* is performance where the experience is expressed and made available in some form to our self and others. Such expressions can be ideas, acts or works of art which disclose humanised life itself (ibid: 15-9). Turner seems to use Dilthey’s philosophy as a source of inspiration and is surprisingly little critical to its implications<sup>8</sup>. It appears to me that it is Dilthey’s transition from experience via expressions to culture as a sort of

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<sup>8</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer provides a critique of Dilthey’s attempt to write a “critique of the historical reason” in order to provide the human science with the objectivity of the natural science *given* by Immanuel Kant (1989).



available objectified mind that catches Turner, since it seemingly solves old philosophical and anthropological problems of making the experiences of others an object of study. However, this thesis is not the place to solve these issues. To sum up, to Turner performances are the expression of an experience and a work of art, such as theatre, is *the* expression that makes it possible to reflect upon experiences. Let me now briefly turn to theatre.

Theatre as a performative tradition denotes both a place and an activity – a set of sites and practises. When theatre is understood as a practise, “enactment, or what [Brecht] calls ‘live representations’” (McAuley 1999: 1) is central. Theatre is about representing a certain understanding or interpretation of social life or “reported or invented happenings between human beings” (Brecht 1964 [1948]: 180). As such, theatre is already an abstraction; it contains several layers of analyses and interpretations. No society is without a least one “story a group tells itself about itself” (Geertz quoted in Turner 1982: 104), labelled by Geertz as a social metacommentary. Theatre, and other performative practices like rituals, “have an important aspect of social metacommentary [...] not only in reading of its experience but in an interpretive reenactment of its experience” (Turner 1990: 8). The partakers and the performers together with other theatre activists involved with the production are all reflecting upon such *live representations*.

Approaching such a field of study implies that you have to act in accordance with several layers of conscious and unconscious voices, interpretations and abstractions. Several of these interpretations of *social reality* are based on theories; folk and academic, religious and profane. This is important to bear in mind, even though all these layers must be considered as the field of study and the informants’ social realities.

## **The Site Frame**

In this thesis two broad levels of sites that stands in a dialectic relationship are emphasised, the urban site and the theatrical performance site. Sites are invested with meaning – they are socially constructed outcomes “subject[ed] to constant attempts to fix identities and

meanings“ (Kong and Law 2002: 1503). Sites are “not facts but artefacts of our interests and our fantasies as well as of our needs to know, to remember, and to forget” (Appadurai 2001: 9). The various meanings given to sites by different actors result in the unfixed, dynamic and divergent *nature* of sites and open them to conflicts, contestations and negotiations (Kong and Law 2002).

When the site is urban, the concept of cityscapes is used to denote the divergent meanings given to it. The suffix “scape” indicates it is a perspectival construct, inflected by “the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors [...that are...] navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part of their own senses of what these landscapes offer” (Appadurai 1990: 296). The term theatrescape is introduced to give similar connotations to the World of Theatre. The various flows of this scape are related to differently according to where you are situated.

### **On Cityscapes**

Cityscapes contain a larger amount of possible perspectives than most other scapes due to the plurality of groups and actors who represent divergent constructed uses and meanings. In this respect, Kolkata is a global city with international finance institutions and direct flights to London, an informational city where education in computing is consumed in order to gain power in the society, a colonial city with a heritage that still incorporates mimicry, a traditional city where Kali temples provide maps to interpret the world and an art city dotted with theatres and literary functions.

With a multitude of meanings ascribed, cityscapes provide a multitude of possible perspectives disclosing a multitude of diverging representations. Within a cityscape new sites making new perspectives and meaning ascribing possible are in constant construction by actors who tries to make their identities and meanings dominating others.

Kaviraj gives an example of the dialectical relation between cityscape and the construction of new sites where a group of poor and homeless conquers a park in Kolkata that was

perceived as public, which at that time meant accessible only to the middleclass and thus naturalising the dominant groups view. They approached the park since they knew it was public and that “public” also denotes “open to everyone, them included”. The homeless managed to take control through dumping refuse, improvise drying stands, and playing football. Capturing the park was an intentional act through which they used a Western rhetoric of the public. Kaviraj sees this as an example on how “the conceptual maps of modernity make an impact not on previously empty conceptual space but on an different conceptual mapping embedded in different practices of space” (1997:112). Through their practise, the homeless constructed the park as a new site, with a new perspective from where the city can be experienced. It changed the cityscape through the introduction of a new spatial founded conceptual map that ascribed new meanings to similar public parks in Kolkata, and the status of the homeless and the public.

Anthropological studies of globalisation are influential within the field of urban studies through its “focused attention on the transnational aspects [or processes] of migration, culture-making, and identity management, and on the shifting cultural environments and meaning that contextualize (and decontextualize) behaviour” (Low 1996: 402). The urban site is seen as the best place to understand such processes since they often become intensified (due to the competing representations), and thereby more sensible, in cities (Low 1996). Hence, it is no coincidence that this story of Nandikar takes place in an urban location.

Cities have always been, and still are, the main intersects for processes of globalisation and modernisation. Low sees the “city as a site of everyday practises [that] provides valuable insights into the linkages of macroprocesses [like colonialism and globalisation] with the texture and fabric of human experience” (1996: 384). Kolkata was founded as one intersect among many others between the wealthy interiors of Bengal and foreign markets. It was a trading post, a *baajaar* where the power struggle of exchange and plunder took place, a junction from where India became a part of England, and England a part of India. While economical gain was the prime mover in the foundation of the trading post that became

Kolkata it resulted in the production and exchange of other things than jute and textiles, since knowledge also is something that gets exchanged. One hybrid society, the English, met another hybrid society, the Bengali, and formed a new melange. And this melange, with its unequal power structures, formed the locality and was formed by it.

To return to the term glocalisation, which has been used to describe processes whereby (traditional) practises and artefacts are disembedded from their locality and then re-embedded far away in a new local context (Featherstone and Lash 1995, Robertson 1995). Glocalisation is employed in order to describe a global creation of locality through institutionalisation of given practises. An example is the British Empires construction of cities around the world with a fairly similar colonial architecture posing their colonial power (Lee 2001: 91). This is a view that closes the fact that the British practises also are hybrid.

In Kolkata, the prevailing style of colonial power buildings was built in a neo-classical tradition; the first theatre the Britons built had roman columns – playing part in evoking the image of a powerful empire. It also under-communicate the Bengali practises that played a part in the construction of a locality of new practises. This must not be misunderstood; the colonisers forced institutions and practises on their colonial subjects. They had an image of a dual city where they could live their lives as Britons separate from the Indians. But despite of an ideology of purity also “the British” became saturated with “the Indian”.

Kolkata grew out of exchange on many levels based on an uneven distribution of power, but it was an exchange in which forms from the many culture manifestations present became separated from existing practises and got recombined with new forms in new practises, like the hybridisation of Pieterse 1995. The urban site where the informants live must thus be understood as an expression of hybridising practises, at the same time as it can be seen as influential in constituting such practises. This is a topic that will be elaborated in chapter 6.

## Summing Up

There might seem to be a contradiction in the emphasis on globalisation, local practises and on the stated importance of sites. Perhaps it is a contradiction in terms, but not in the actual living portrayed in this thesis. I refuse to use of the term glocalisation (Robertson 1995), as a conceptualisation of globalisation/localisation combined, in this thesis since it conceals local creative *adaptations* and interpretations. It is a term that advocates a view of the existence of both a purer “global culture” and the pre-existence of a pure local culture and disguises the hybridity of all cultures due to contact or globality.

Instead, I depart from a set of practises and sites that are localised in time and space, through which different flows or processes of globalisation are both seen from outside and experienced from inside, at the same time as Nandikar participants also contribute to globalisation. With this is hybridisation emphasised, and creative and alternative relations given pre-eminence. The practises and sites of this thesis are seen as ways to make sense in a complex and fluid world. They are conditioned by contact and globalisation, and thus able to *express* contact and globalisation.

In this thesis I discuss how Nandikar theatre constitutes a set of practises and sites engaging in discourses on globalisation. The participants are seen simultaneously as affected by external flows and as a part of them. Theatre, as performance, constitutes practises and sites through both the phases of workshops/rehearsals and public performances. With these sketches of my theoretical frames, it is time to present a more elaborated introduction to Bengali theatre and Nandikar – their history, productions, activities and ideologies.

### 3 Bengali and Nandikar Theatre



Nandikar rehearsal

This chapter is an attempt to trace the history of Nandikar as it enacts its ways through distant and close epochs and places, practises and sites, before a description of the group itself is given. The chapter ends with my *adaptation* of a generalised, reflexive ideology of Nandikar.

#### **On Theatre and Nandikar**

What is theatre? In order to begin unravelling what theatre means I will start looking at what Oxford Dictionary says. The word *theatre* refers to “a place constructed ... for viewing dramatic plays or other spectacles ... [an] edifice specially adapted to dramatic representations” and “[d]ramatic performances as a branch of art, or as an institution “ (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). Accordingly, in this thesis theatre is a central term denoting both an activity and a place. In theatre studies, as it developed in the twentieth century, theatre as an art form, as a performance, an enactment, a live representation, needs

partakers to make sense. To make it short, theatre can be defined with the words of Grotowski as “what takes place between spectator and actor” (1969: 32-33 in McAuley 1999: 2), and, without himself emphasising it, the notion of place also gets captured. Theatre is something that takes place “live” within a given space and it requires the simultaneous presence of both performer and partakers (McAuley 1999). The processes leading up to theatre – like rehearsals, studying, organising, construction of sets, exercise of voice and body, etc. – are not theatre as such. Grotowski, acknowledging the importance of these activities to theatre and labelled them “paratheatrical” (in McAuley 1999). They constitute not theatre, but play parts in making the meeting as meaningful as intended. This raw, down to earth, definition of theatre is rather eurocentric, the word *theatre* itself stem from antique Greek. But the word *theatre* is almost as common a word in Kolkata as its Bengali equivalent *naatak*, which has similar connotations. *Naatak* stems from the noun *naat*, denoting dancing, acting, dramatic performance and stage (Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary 1987). While *naatak* is colloquially used in the same way as theatre, it more specifically denotes theatrical work (play, drama). A theatre place is usually referred to as *naatakmahal* (lit. theatre building), when not using an English term.

The theatre group is the social entity engaged in performative activities in front of partakers, whereby the group’s participants create different places in relation to their surroundings. The theatre group of this thesis has a name, Nandikar, which can be translated as “the one who begins something”; “the one who starts on a woodwork”; “speaker of the prelude to a drama”. The theatre of Nandikar is prelude, a beginning, but not an ending – it is the means and not the object. The name emphasises the part the members mean theatre plays in a wider context, the theatre of Nandikar is not self sufficient, but it plays a part in wider drama – the drama of everyday life.

The participants of Nandikar are in the middle of a search for a new theatre, a theatre that can be called their own – not a British or a traditional Kolkatan one. They feel the competition from TV beamed into the drawing rooms across the world, from cinema and the ideology of escapism and they want to create a theatre that stands on its own, with a

“new” theatre language that belong wholly to the theatre. In a speech Sir gave, he started with thanking the audience for its presence in the auditorium instead of being prey of cable TV. However, the participants say it is not they who can make theatre popular again; it is the partakers that must feel the desire. Their duty is to make a theatre that makes sense for the partakers to engage in.

What makes theatre meaningful, hence engaging? The issues raised during a performance, the fashion the topics are presented to the partakers or “substance” and “form” combined? The members’ solution to form and how to bring out an engaging theatre is to emphasise three aspects of theatre: Visibility, Musicality and Physicality. In a country that resembles more a continent in term of differences; in a world where communication technology brings new information into your home on a daily basis and you into others’ homes; transcending gaps between speakers of different languages and children of different socio-cultural background becomes a motivating desire. The desire also includes increasing the number of performances abroad.

The theatre activities of Nandikar are a result of a multitude of different processes through time and space. It is the outcome of a group of individuals’ interaction with its surroundings, with its time and places, at the same time as it denotes a beginning. In the end, when people come and get captured by the prelude, Nandikar becomes a part of the social realities it portrays. And now, after this prelude, it is time to enter the worlds of Kolkata theatre.

## **A Very Short Kolkata Theatre Story**

When you enter the playhouses and places of Kolkata, when you start to engage with the performances of the theatre groups of this city, when you start to understand the meanings of the acts on and off the stage, when you discover the references certain melodies, movements, words have to performative traditions, miscellaneous media, different places, other times, various paradigms, then begins the seductive journey into the world(s) of theatre. Theatre as an art form, with its practises and sites, is important to the social



scientist when it is understood in its relations to society (Klausen 1992: 178), its place in given societies.

From the aesthetically philosophies *Natyasastra* of Bharata-muni (1950, see also Richmond 1990a; Kulnakarni 1994; Schechner 2001 for introduction) and the *Poetics* of Aristotle (1982) to the plays of Kalidasa and Shakespeare – from the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* and the Bengali poem *Meghnad Bodh Kabya* to the songs of the *jatra* and the alienation of Brechtian theatre. From one of the founders of modern theatre Stanislavski and characterisation to the masters of the “masculine and extremely vigorous” Bengali *purulia chau* dance (Tsubaki and Richmond 1990) – from *rabindraasangeet* (songs composed by Nobel Price laureate (1913) Rabindranath Tagore) to the high pitched tunes of Bollywood movie songs. This is the engaging maelstrom that depicts modern Kolkata theatre. Has the theatre of Kolkata at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reached an uncountable number of ancestors and foremothers, or do it not have any no roots (to use a metaphor also common in Bengal) at all? Is it possible to locate the soil nurturing Kolkata theatre in one place, or does it feed from many fields? Kolkata’s theatre traditions are dangerously similar to an essentialising metaphor of the metropolitan city, with its many sources of inspiration, and its hybridity.

Even if it is possible to say that Nandikar defines its own theatre tradition, on the basis of the activists’ performative ideals and the wide variety of activities, it is usually placed within a tradition or movement labelled Group Theatre. And it is from the place of this tradition I will trace some of the major strands of inspirations Nandikar works within and against, and in dialectical and embodied relationships with.

The Group Theatre-tradition started in Kolkata during the 40-ties as the “Other Theatre”, “a theatre that is not *professional* or *commercial*, a theatre different in aims and objective – a centre of various experiments in theme, content, production, etc.” (Mukherjee 1982: 356). As “the Other” it started in opposition to the main theatres of the city, the so-called

public and commercial ones<sup>9</sup>. The major break-through for this “new” way of doing theatre occurred in 1944 when the leftist Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) performed *Jabanbondi* at Star and then *Nabanna* at Sri Rangam. The performance of the latter, written by Bijon Bhattacharya and directed by himself and Sambhu Mitra, made the greatest impact and is popularly described as the birth of Group Theatre (Raha 1978 and 1990; Mukherjee 1982; Bharucha 1983; Roy 1990; Mukhopadhyay 1999).

It was a time when great changes took place in India. Japan joined the Axis Powers and the Second World War got closer to the borders of colonial India (Moorhouse 1983 [1971]: 119; Wolpert 2000: 334). After the downfall of Singapore and Burma, India herself was threatened in very short time. The year was 1942, in India the fight for freedom from the colonial rulers reached new heights – Mahatma Gandhi initiated the Quit India movement in August and calls from the Bengali freedomfighter Netaji Subhas Chandra from outside India to overthrow the British rule and create *Azad* (Free) India (Wolpert 2000: 337) got an enthusiastic response. The colonial rulers felt they were fighting a war on two fronts. In order to resist the Japanese threat, they arrested national leaders and freedomfighters by the thousands. As a part of their plan to “terrorize the people into submission” (Mukherjee 1982: 360) they created an artificial food shortage in Bengal that culminated in the man-made famine of 1943 (Nehru 1999 [1946]: 495-9; Moorhouse 1983 [1971]: 119-27; Wolpert 2000: 336). In the streets of Kolkata alone, more than 3 million people died.

The theatre of that time, the public theatre with entertainment as its single concern, could not respond to the needs of the times – they were in the hands of the rulers. It was then, on the 24th of October, *Nabanna* (meaning new rice, new harvest, or harvest festival of the month of *Poush*) was staged for the first time. It was a socially committed play displaying the life and problems of a group of peasants as anonymous victims of the famine, passing through a series of crises as they leave their “village only to be reduced to the most abject

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<sup>9</sup> Resembles what they in England call “Fringe theatre”, in London “off West End theatre” and in New York “off Broadway theatre”, again it is defined in opposition to the established theatres.

acknowledge poverty in Kolkata, where they develop a political awareness of their suffering” (Bharucha 1982: 48). And it shall have left the partakers stunned:

[It] was totally different from all that had gone before. Its contemporaneity was in any case inescapable as was its thematic realism. In content and form *Nabanna* blazed the trail of a new theatrical idiom (Raha 1993: 155).

The play articulated the feelings of its time in a new theatrical language. When the public theatre attracted partakers with sets larger than life – imitating everything except harsh realities – and pyrotechniques and illusory effects were almost a goal in itself in order to spellbind, *Nabanna* offered the opposite. The focus changed; to tell stories that felt important and the (inter-)acting in order to communicate the stories became the main objectives. What the production of *Nabanna* did in its time to the theatre going crowd of Kolkata, the Group Theatre troupes try to achieve even today.

*Nabanna* became, and still is, the name of the turmoil, the dialogue, the commentary, the expression, the contemporaneity and engagement every troupe tries to evoke through its performances. This particular production gave birth to the Group Theatre movement where Nandikar became a notable participant already from its foundation in 1960 (Mukherjee 1982: 382-5). The issues of Group Theatre usually departs from an urge to “draw attention to the plight of common people, and exposing [...] meanness and corruption” (ibid: 365), to be committed and make a difference, to learn and to teach about human conditions. Also the inclination towards performing plays with a “serious content” is said to be a hallmark many Group Theatres pride themselves with (Richmond 1990b: 294). At the same time it searches for artistically experimentation, advances and refinement, of acting and theatre as an art form.

It is given *one* label and called *a* tradition or movement, but Group Theatre troupes consist not of a singular category of theatre troupes with an identical ideology, a united view on theatre, or a common goal for their performative activities. It is given one name and called a tradition more so because of the activists’ sources of inspiration, their organisational structure, social commitment in one way or another, and their (historical) point of

departure. The Group Theatre is understood in opposition to the commercial public theatre, it wants to be a social agent, it usually consist of amateurs, who all feel some sort of obligation to *Nabanna* and the history of the social committed theatre activists. It should be added that the heritage of Rabindranath Tagore also is experienced by many as an important ideal in the search for a genuine Bengali theatre.

Theatrically the activists' traditions of performance are an offspring of many different traditions; the Kolkata theatre was strongly influenced by the British theatre of colonial India, the Bengali folk theatre traditions with emphasis on *jatra* and the theatre, literature, music, poems and songs of Tagore. In Kolkata, theatre was first introduced by British traders and colonial rulers. The settlers brought with them theatre and the earliest of the English theatre buildings was The Playhouse which dates back to 1753. The colonial theatre was Shakespearean and its purpose was to entertain the English population (Nair (ed.) 1989; Mukherjee 1982). At this point in time there existed no Indian theatre as such in Bengal except *jatra*, but different performative traditions flourished. And the existence of these, together with the rise of a Bengali middleclass, is said to pave the ground for a new Indian theatre in Kolkata and subsequently in the rest of the subcontinent (Raha 1993: 1). The Bengali theatre was born into a period called the Bengali renaissance in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period characterised by the rise of an indigenous educated elite epitomised first by the *nouveaux riches Babus* and later by the *Bhadraloks*, the Western-educated professional urbanised middleclass (Raychoudhuri 1990; Hannerz 1992).

## **Jatra**

The wide variety of influences also signifies that various ideas, philosophies and forms of performances are absorbed into the melange of Bengali theatre. The two main traditions that have inspired Group Theatre are the Bengali *jatra* and European theatre of the last 150 years. The *jatra* of Bengal is a form of folk theatre with a long history (Raha 1978; Sengupta 1984; Banerjee 1989a; Ødegård 1993; Ruud 1997). The term itself denotes literally a travel, a journey or the start of a journey, but the etymological meaning is unknown. It is said to originate from “the ritual of songs and dances which formed part of

the religious festivals in villages” (Banerjee 1989a: 103). Traditionally a majority of the *jatra* compositions centred on episodes in the lives of Krishna and Radha, but also other *devas* (gods) and *devis* (goddesses), legendary supermen and deities, including local ones, were not excluded as subjects of *jatra* (Raha 1978). From being a mainly religious theatre, it changed during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century when it turned into a more mundane form of easy entertainment<sup>10</sup>. *Jatra* plays are performed in a square or round area usually with the partakers sitting all around. As a performative practise it is often connected to the use of concert overtures and prologues, a *juri* (singing chorus), operatic music based on classical *ragas* (Indian improvised music), high pitched emotional acting, elaborated and flourish rhetoric, and a comic relief (Raha 1978; Banerjee 1989a). These are all conventions and features that both Bengali theatre in general, and Group Theatre have borrowed and still are. But a more visible and emphasised aspiration for Group Theatre is found in “the West”.

## European Theatre

When the realist theatre started in Europe, especially under the influence of Konstantin Stanislavsky and The Moscow Art Theatre, it soon reached India “on the wings of colonialism” (Schechner 2002: 148-51). In realistic acting the actor is supposed to “identify deeply with the character – to such a degree that the actors own self is fused with the self of the character” (ibid: 151). The partakers shall experience the performed character as real, living persons since the actor “disappears into the role” (ibid: 151). Realistic acting shall seem natural, but it is a style, not real life itself (ibid: 152). To the Group Theatre Bertolt Brecht became a main source of inspiration with his emphasis on “theatre of argument instead of that of empathy” (Mukherjee 1982: 429). With Brecht, Bengali theatre started to distance itself from realistic theatre that supposedly creates a world seducing the partakers since it re-produces the known and familiar. In opposition to this Brecht evoked the alienation effect, which implies that the actors shall not identify

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<sup>10</sup> There is today a somewhat elitistic comprehension of *jatra* as an originally genuine tradition that have turned into a low form of entertainment with the incorporation of “impurities [like] coarse humour, bawdy songs and crudities” (Raha 1978: 6). Occasionally it is portrayed as subaltern practise of critique (Banerjee 1989a).

with the characters 100 percent, but maintain a distance – in enacting, through comments and explaining. To break the illusions, and stir up intellectual and critical engagement among the partakers in order to make them think about their own lives instead of identifying themselves with the characters (ibid.).

## **Sanskrit Theatre**

This is an attitude towards acting and theatre that resonance with aspects of Sanskrit theatre, where the actor's capability to go beyond the phase of simply identify with the character to a state where the actor always is totally aware of – almost himself a partaker to – the characterisation of emotions (Schechner 1990). Sanskrit theatre is tightly connected to the work *Natyasastra*, supposedly written by the mythic-historical Bharata-muni.

*Natyasastra* is a sacred manual of performance and performance theory. Scholars have placed its date anywhere from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. (Richmond 1990a; Schechner 2000). Some centuries after it was completed, it was lost as a complete text and only fragments were passed on. The teachings of *Natyasastra* however lived on through performers and their Gurus, and subsequently in their performances. It is said that “the *Natyasastra* is more danced than read” (Schechner 2000: 28), and according to my experience of Group Theatre this is also the case today. As a complete text *Natyasastra* was brought to light in recent times primarily by Western orientalist.

In *Natyasastra* there is a strong emphasis on performance (in opposition to the Poetics where the drama texts provide the main focus, not the actual acting of these texts): “emotional expressions as conveyed by specific gestures and movements, role and character types, theatre architecture and music” (Schechner 2000; 28-9). Here the ideal of *naatak* (theatre) as performances that integrates drama, dance and music is put forward, an ideal still present in Bengali theatre and among Nandikar participants. In addition there is the theory of *rasa*, or *ras* as it is said in Bengali. *Ras* means flavour, taste and the juice that conveys the flavour. In *Natyasastra* good acting is supposed to extend pleasure by evoking the *sthayi bhavas*, or the eight permanent and indwelling emotions of man – *ras* is tasting or experiencing the *sthayi bhavas*. Acting thus denotes “the art of presenting the sthayi

bhavas so that both the performer and partaker can ‘taste’ the emotion, the *rasa*” (ibid.). One of the main commentators to *Natyasastra* Abinavagupta, a main exponent of Kashmiri Shaivism who lived around the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E., added a ninth *ras*, *shanta* or bliss that is not corresponding to any indwelling emotion, but refers to a perfect mix between them all or as transcending them. The actor is supposed to let the partakers experience or feel *ras* through artistically perform and thus communicate the emotions. The *sthayi bhavas*, emotions, in this system are objective, while the feelings (*ras*) are subjective.

Within Nandikar the concept of *ras* is occasionally used. Primarily they use it to describe good acting as “full of *ras*”, as a performance that communicate emotions and evokes the feelings. How to communicate the emotions is described in *Natyasastra* by referring to stylised gestures like *mudras*, which are specified hand gestures. The knowledge of *Natyasastra* – of *ras*, *mudras*, *sthayi bhavas* – lives on in Bengali theatre, both in its performances, and as elements of performative techniques that is employed. The ideal of combining different traditions is central to another source of inspiration, namely Tagore (Serebriany 1996).

## **Rabindranath Tagore**

While Rabindranath Tagore’s (1861-1941) engagement with theatre pre-dates Group Theatre, it is mainly with this movement Tagore made an indirect impact on Bengali theatre (Sengupta 1984). He was, and still remains, an outsider. The theatre of Tagore takes the theatre of the Bengali Renaissance as a starting point at the same time he was influenced by the European tradition of opera. Music and dance is important in many of Tagore’s plays. To what extent he influenced and influence Bengali theatre is difficult to say, and scholars disagree on this topic (Raha 1979; Mukherjee 1982).

Among Nandikar participants the awareness and pride of Tagore were highly and often declared. They used him as an emblem of Bengali greatness and innovation, as someone who made an impact on the West (with reference to the Nobel price), as representing an intellectual tradition of Bengali theatre, and as a test to check foreigners’ “cultural capital”

and knowledge of Bengali art. Nandikar has performed Tagore plays and he is presented in the performance *Ei Saahar Ei Saamoy*. But more dominant, he was present mainly through frequent recitations of something he had written, a poem or through singing and playing his songs, the *tagoresaangeet*.

Now, when the artistic history and context to Nandikar has been roughly presented it is time to introduce the group itself into this many-dimensional image.

## **Nandikar**

A tailor, a shopkeeper, a few college lectures, school teachers and postal peons, a large number of unemployed young men and women and Ajitesh Bandyopadyay founded Nandikar on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1960.

Soon, very soon, Nandikar became one of the prime movers of the Group Theatre movement in Bengal and in India. With a repertoire of plays, which entertain and yet endeavour to find the meaning of lives and the environment they thrive in, Nandikar has constantly experimented with forms and themes, embracing the bold and the beautiful much before these words lost their pristine meaning in the jungles of mindless soaps beamed into the drawing rooms (Nandikar 2001).

When the participants of Nandikar present themselves in written words, they do it as in this epigraph. When they are asked to present the group as individuals, the outcome is different, but not in contradiction to the official version. The seniors stick more to the written version; after all, they were the ones who wrote it. Many of the juniors refer to popular plays performed by the group through its history, some they have seen and others they have just heard about. They mention playwrights like Arthur Miller and Michael Madusdhan Datta. But most of all they answer referring to the respected and famous, loved and hated actors and directors of the group. People like the now deceased Ajitesh Bandyopadyay and Kaya Chakroborty which they only know through their seniors, plays they have read and perhaps seen new productions, photographs or movies of. But more often the names of Rudraprasad Sengupta, the most senior member of the group, and both director and actor, Swatilekha Sengupta (Swati-di), the leading female actor of the group,



and Goutam Halder (Goutam-da), representing the new generation of directors and actors, are the answer given in a voice filled with respect, love and a whole lot of pride. This is the group they are participants in; these are the histories they now are a part of.

To establish Nandikar also as a context I will present its history, organisation, plays, projects, books and training, because as the contexts, or spaces, that the members of the group operate within these notions are important. Doing this, I want to extract, create and communicate a sort of Nandikar “ideology”. The ideology is not going to be coherent since no single and coherent view on theatre and acting exists from what I learned. Several voices speak, different ways of acting are performed, several theories are represented and it is probably better to speak about ideologies.

## **The History**

Nandikar, “one of the most prominent groups of West Bengal” (Mukhopadhyay 1999: 75), is founded under the leadership of Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay in 1960. To perform good Drama in a good manner and in a better way is the Nandikar activists’ motto (ibid.). They emphasise the aesthetics as a goal in its own right, at the same time as good theatre is seen as a right purpose in order to make theatre that are socially committed.

The groups’ first production is *Bidehi* (1960), an adaptation of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. The following year the group becomes affiliated to IPTA, but already in the end of 1962 it breaks out and registers as an independent organisation. Four years later it experiences its first major break-up, which eventually lead to the creation of Theatre Workshop. In 1970 it rents Rangana Playhouse and starts regular theatre performances with four shows each week. Nandikar is the second Group Theatre troupe able to do so (Raha 1993: 188). Despite several success productions it only last for 5 years. 1977 witnesses the loss of Nandikar’s major actor Keya Chakrabarty, described by Kiranmaya Raha, a writer on Bengali theatre and cinema, as “a superb actress who brought a cerebral quality to the business of acting not seen before” (Raha 1993: 187), and a break-up where Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay leaves the group and forms Nandimukt. It is a break-up that attracts a lot

of attention the following years. Many claim to know the reason for this break-up, but the real reasons are seen as a part of the group's lore that the surroundings do not need to know. It constitutes a small and minor part of the group's inner history that demarcates those who are within and those who are not. Break-ups of Group Theatre troupes are not unusual; in fact, it is often described as a common feature to this kind of theatre (Sengupta 1984; Mukhopadhyay 1999).

The result of this break-up is that Rudraprasad Sengupta, with his "dynamic leadership, untiring energy and organising ability" (Raha 1993: 188), becomes the President at the end of the 70-ties. A new era starts, with Nandikar turning from a pure performance oriented theatre group to an organisation with a wide range of projects, including an annual national theatre festival.

## **The Organisational Structure**

Nowadays Nandikar is an organisation consisting of 13 proper members with the right to attend the General Assembly, vote and become part of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consists of a President, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer and two members. The committee is mostly concerned with administrative tasks. The proper members' responsibilities concern both administration and artistic decisions. The next grouping consists of 20 associated members. It is from this group that new members are elected. People are offered membership when they have shown dedication to the work, willingness to continue as theatre activists and credibility as actors. The last grouping consists of approximately 15 trainees of the 30 that were accepted that participate in a one-year long workshop. New members of Nandikar are elected by the General Assembly.

## **The Participants**

The participants of Nandikar can be categorised in different ways. One is according to membership rank as shown above; that is if they are proper members, associated members or trainees. It also makes sense to use traditional anthropological signifiers of differentiation as gender, age and status. Another way is using level of activity or time spent on the group's work. Yet another meaningful way to categorise them is to focus on

education. Every one of these methods of categorisation makes sense when talking about Nandikar and each of them provides valid representations of the group.

As mentioned in the introduction, within Nandikar you are seen either a junior or a senior, and this refer primarily to the time they have worked with Nandikar, including mainly two parameters: the time from when they first became associated and how much time they spend with the group. Only secondly do the categories refer to age. Everyone above you in the hierarchy is a senior, and those below you are your juniors. In addition to these two fluid and relative categories there are the trainees. They are somewhat outside the group.

In this thesis, I found it useful to divide the participants into four more static groups: The trainees, the juniors, the established and the seniors. Trainees are not considered to be part of the group as such, even though they play minor parts in certain plays. Their age vary, but the majority are between 17 and 25 years, and they are present only during the in-house workshops and when they perform. The juniors are all associated members, who have been with Nandikar for up to five to seven years, and the oldest of this group is around 34. The established have been with the group from seven to 16 years, some of them have Nandikar as their only occupation and around 50 percent of this group are proper members. The seniors are all proper members, some have been associated with the group since its beginning and some of them are fully occupied working with the group. It is from the group of established members and seniors that the main actors are found, it is also they who run the organisation and are in charge of the different workshops.

The juniors are perceived as students of the group, but they are also into acting and are given responsibilities concerning the making of stage sets, getting all the props and so on. They also participate as helpers in workshops and help out with the organisational work. It is also the juniors' job to buy *caa*, *paan*, *muri* or whatever someone higher up in the Nandikar hierarchy desires. Something that I will discuss later is how the hierarchy manifests itself in different ways concerning responsibilities, types of work and ways of

showing respect. The three categories have no rigid borders and several members exist in the borderlands.

Since the mid-eighties the main means of recruiting new members is the in-house workshop. Once a year there is a small advertisement in Kolkata newspapers declaring that you can apply to take part on a course as a trainee of Nandikar. The theatre course lasts nine months and takes place two to four afternoons each week. After the application is sent, the applicants are invited to an interview. The interviewers are proper members of Nandikar and they try to find out how dedicated the applicants are to join the course and become a theatre actor. They range the dedication to offer time on theatre and the 30 who score the highest points get the offer to become trainees. There is a small fee to enter the education, which in reality is neglected since only a few of the trainees can afford to pay. When I started my fieldwork, the trainees had been with Nandikar for about six months and as a result I was not able to follow the larger part of their education. Their training is not totally isolated from the regular Nandikar rehearsals since they are given small roles in plays as an important part of their education. First they performed as a crowd in *Naagar Keertan*, and secondly, towards the end of their period as trainees, they were given roles in *Football* too. And when they play with Nandikar they are included in the work of assembling the sets and they learn other sides of theatre besides acting. When finishing their year as trainees they can enter the group as associated members. And now it is the dedication and willingness to transform and learn, together with talent, that determine their future in Nandikar. Most of the present day members started their life with Nandikar this way.

## **The Economy**

It must be stressed that Nandikar's economical situation is weak even when it operate with high numbers in its annual accounts. The reason for this is that Nandikar strives to become a professional group, at least for more than just a few of its members. The strategy chosen to make this dream come through is turning from a purely performance oriented group to become a group which work with theatre in a multitude of different ways, as shown in the

presentation of the activists different projects later in this chapter<sup>11</sup>. Working with these projects makes it possible to get different types of grants from the state (Richmond 1990b: 435), the government and NGOs.

Today several (about 12) of the members have their only income from Nandikar, but most of these receive additional support from family members (this group includes members who also are students) and four of them receive personal theatre education stipends from the government for two years. The larger group have other sources of income. The salary that each participant get is adjusted to their needs and the time spent working for the group. Participation in a performance gives everyone a fixed fee. The group's goal is to reach a salary that equals that of a teacher. There is still a long way to go before this is achieved. As means to reach this goal, a new project is under planning: a theatre laboratory, a theatre school where the Nandikar members can become teachers and at the same time do what they love the most.

## The Plays

Nandikar's present repertoire consists of ten different productions, covering three languages. Of these are seven adaptations from English texts done by Sir. One play is written by one of the director-actors of the group, Goutam Halder, together with his friend Kaushik Roy Chowdhury. I was able to see nine of the plays one or more times, and I participated in one. *Antigone* was not performed when I did my fieldwork. The following list shows the repertoire the group could stage at any time during my Kolkata fieldwork:

- *Antigone* (Bengali): Based on *Antigone* by Sophocles and Jean Anouilh, translated by Chittaranjan Ghosh, directed by Rudraprasad Sengupta.
- *Shesh Sakshatkaar*(Bengali): Based on *The Last Appointment* by Vladlen Dozortsevs, adapted and directed by Rudraprasad Sengupta.

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<sup>11</sup> The economical situation is not the only reason why Nandikar launched different off-stage projects. The desire to do something that made a deeper impact outside the circle of theatre lovers, as a consequence of their felt responsibilities for their society, was the primary reason.

- *Feriwalaar Mrityu* (Bengali): Based on *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, adapted and directed by Rudraprasad Sengupta.
- *Meghnad Bodh Kabya* (Bengali): An epic poem by Michael Madhusudan Datta, directed by Goutam Halder.
- *Gotraheen* (Bengali): Based on *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller, adapted and directed by Rudraprasad Sengupta.
- *Naagar Keertan* (Bengali): Written by Kaushik RoyChowdhury & Goutam Halder, directed by Goutam Halder.
- *Ei Saahar Ei Saamoy* (Bengali): A collage of songs and poems.
- *Shanu Roy Chowdhury* (Bengali, has been done with an English beginning): Based on *Shirley Valentine* by Willy Russell, adapted by Rudraprasad Sengupta, and directed by Swatilekha Sengupta.
- *Maramiya Mon / The Gentle Spirit* (Bengali & English): Based on the novel *The Gentle Spirit* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, adapted to Bengali by Rudraprasad Sengupta and directed by Goutam Halder.
- *Football* (Hindi & Bengali): Based on Peter Terson's *Zigger Zagger* and Rudraprasad Sengupta's Bengali adaptation, translated to Hindi and directed by Swatilekha Sengupta. This is the first play Nandikar has done in Hindi and the one in which I had a minor part.

Nandikar's reputation includes many different aspects and the English adaptations is one of them. The other main characteristic, which people use when they describe Nandikar, is often mannerism, given both positive and negative connotations, or a very physical performative language.

## **Today and Tomorrow**

Nandikar is in the process of searching for new forms of performing, a theatre marked by musicality, visibility and physicality. The process started about 15 years ago and it is a process the participants never intend to stop. In the late 70s and the early 80s Bengali theatre lost its momentum as an important and meaningful cultural activity among the

inhabitants of especially Kolkata. Theatre became alienated to the people it was supposed to serve and this was a tendency that increased with the growing influence of satellite TV. Out of this analysis of the situation, Nandikar, under the leadership of Sir, started to search for a new theatre. In the beginning it was based on in-house workshops in order to educate new members to the theatre performances the activists wanted to present. The Nandikar participants' experimental plays from this period is said to have generally appealed to young members of the middle class (Richmond 1990b). Through their experiences with the below-mentioned projects their new goal is to get a plot of land in Bidhan Naagar and build a theatre laboratory with a stage. There are no able playhouses in Bidhan Naagar, but a large population of potential partakers. When (they have decided that they will manage it, there is no question of if) they have their own theatre laboratory it becomes possible to offer classes in different performative traditions and a stage for hire and their own performances. Hopefully, this also means that theatre becomes a possibility to earn a necessary living for the Nandikar participants. The projects and activities that Nandikar has been, or is, involved with can be described briefly as:

**Playing theatre:** This is, not surprisingly, the main and most important activity. It includes every step of putting a play on stage, from the birth of the idea to the première. On average Nandikar performs between one and two plays every week, the peak time is during the winter months (Mid-November to Mid-February). There are two types of shows: shows that the participants are invited to do for a fixed payment (call-shows or invited shows) and those that they arrange themselves. The former of these is the type of show that usually gives Nandikar the chance to earn some money on performing, because self-arranged shows do not generate much income. Invitations to perform abroad often give a better salary, especially if abroad means Sweden or United States of America, as opposed to e.g. Bangladesh.

**In-house workshops:** Initiated as means to recruit and train new Nandikar-members: "In house production-oriented theatre training [...] for six to nine months [each year]

for about 30 young people”. Arranged in Nandikar’s own rooms in Shyambazaar Street.

Theatre with the Youth: Initiated in 1980, still running. Consist of production-oriented training both within the group, and vis-à-vis independent and young theatre troupes.

National Theatre Festival: Initiated in 1984, still running. Organised under the objective to provide a counter balance from the cultural world against divisive and disintegrating tendencies rocking the sub-continent and to create a forum for an interaction of multi-lingual and multi-cultural theatre forms.

Theatre-In-Education: Initiated in 1989, still running. The main aim as they present it in “Nandikar Profile” (Nandikar 2001) is to let the school children know their milieu and perceive their world through theatre, to initiate their analysis of his milieu, to sharpen the interface between the “I and the World” and help them assume the role of world-changers. As part of the project there have been arranged training for 250 teachers from 80 schools in West-Bengal, short-term workshops at 96 schools and longer-term workshops at 32 schools resulting in stage performances. Nandikar has also documented their TIE-project, made video modules and published a book on theatre games (Sengupta 2000) and a collection of plays for children (Nandikar 2000).

Secondary Schools: Initiated in 1989, still running. Nandikar is often asked to give production-oriented workshops to older children. Same objectives as TIE-project.

Kolkata Rescue: Initiated in 1992, ended in 1998. A project of theatre activities for disadvantaged and handicapped children. Accomplished together with the non-formal educational-cum-social organisation, Kolkata Rescue.



Nivedita Colony: Initiated in 1992, ended a couple of years later. Work with children of the suburban Nivedita Colony of poor Bangladeshi immigrants.

Theatre with Visually Challenged (Blind Opera): Initiated in 1994, last production with Nandikar participation in 1996. I talked with one of the younger people who today works on this project. He told me that Nandikar only was after the money and was of little help.

Theatre with Sex Workers: Initiated in the 1990s, still running. Production-oriented training in co-operation with Komal Gandhar, an organisation of sex workers. When I arrived no one from Nandikar was working on this project. It had just started again when I left, giving me no opportunities to participate in the workshop, but I made an interview about the workshop and the experiences from it.

Nandikar has also, as mentioned, been working abroad. In 1986, 1989 and 1990 the group visited Bangladesh. In August and September 1999 Nandikar undertook a tour to the USA and the UK incorporating performances, lectures and workshops. In the autumn of 2002 they visited Sweden twice to give performances and workshops. On the journeys abroad only those needed in the performances or the administration go.

The history, organisation, plays and projects of Nandikar give implicit hints towards the senior activists' ideas of what theatre should be about. In the remaining chapters these ideals will be made as explicit as possible, but before I enter the streets of Kolkata a short introduction to the basic ideals of Nandikar is presented.

## **Learning to Think and Do Theatre**

The road to become a theatre activist – an athlete philosopher, a *bhaalo maanus* (good person), a truthful woman or a being that is accepted as a reasonable good actor – consist primarily of a long period of learning, thinking and practicing the living art of theatre. To travel this road towards becoming a theatre activist demands that one accepts submission

and is willing to change. One has to transform and learn in a certain way in order to achieve the reflexivity the seniors advocate as necessary in order to become a good activist. To describe this within the social scientists conceptual nomenclature let me turn to Bourdieu (1977). In this context, Bourdieu is used, as one of the most known representatives of social science, because of his well-established descriptions of the world he has decided to grasp intellectually and the conceptual nomenclature he develops in order to adapt this understanding.

Bourdieu writes about how the body is treated as memory in *Towards a Theory of Practice* in the process of creating a “new person” through deculturation and reculturation. In this process of creating a new social person or, on a different level, in the formation of identity, the emphasis is on the embodiment of insignificant details such as clothes, bearing, physical and verbal manners. These insignificant details are part of a certain culture/structure in a society at large or in an institution. And he continues:

The principles embodied [...] are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence, cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot be made explicit, nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious than the values given body, made body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of installing a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]: 94).

If this is a description of socialisation in general, the Nandikar ideas of socialising new participants are the opposite. Despite or perhaps due to this discrepancy, through the language of Bourdieu the reflexive ideologies of Nandikar’s theatre education could easily be verbalised paraphrasing Bourdieu. Nandikar’s understanding of the body as memory is the same, but the seniors try to teach themselves and the juniors to make the embodied principles within the grasp of consciousness, and hence,

be both reached and touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation,  
be made explicit if desired,

and the values given body, made body are indeed precious, and, even if they are a result of transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, it is necessary that they are made effable, communicable and imitable, that they can be explored as a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy.

The theatre of Nandikar incorporates some of the terms that Bourdieu uses, but on an independent basis. It is my belief that practising Nandikar theatre is to understand what Bourdieu calls de-culturation or re-culturation and being able to use this understanding in the processes of rehearsals and performances. The focal point is change, change towards becoming a better social person through the craft and art of acting, to sharpen, as Swati-di writes, the interface between “I and the World” (Sengupta 2000).

It must be emphasised that this is one of my steps to understand Nandikar and the words used do not describe their own way of conceptualising theatre. The Nandikar ideologies is more complex with a wide variation of references. What I learned during my fieldwork was only fragments of their theoretical repertoire. The main practises and site for me learning about their experiences and for the juniors to travel towards becoming athlete philosophers, where body and mind act as one, are the rehearsals and the rehearsal room, and this is where I now proceed.

## 4 Entering Shyambazaar



Juniors and seniors in the rehearsal room

The poet's pen

Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
a local habitation and a name

William Shakespeare

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1979: 104)

In this chapter, the place where Nandikar work is entered and some central participants are introduced. Nandikar resides in the *thanaa* (police district) of Shyambazaar in North Kolkata. For several decades the group have rented three rooms in the ground floor of 47/1 Shyambazaar Street. This is the site for the rehearsals and administration, set making and planning, friendship and turmoil. The site and the practises connected to the rooms express internal social relations and external relations that fragmentary display their place within globalising flows.

## Enter

I enter the office in 47/1 Shyambazaar Street directly from the street and walk through it into the corridor-backyard. The cigarette smoke from the seniors working with administrative tasks swirls with me. In the office Sir reads out loud an email. Partha-da discusses the needed arrangements for a visiting group from Assam that shall perform during the Theatre Festival with Jyoti-da. The smoke from the filter cigarettes mixes with the smell of moisture, urine and perspiration as I enter the backyard. To my left, on the floor along the wall, there are several pairs of sandals and boots nicely placed on both sides of the closed double door to the rehearsal room. I start to listen to a short piece of music played on *taablaa* (drum) and harmonium. And then someone starts to sing. Silence, and then again, the music starts. This time there are many voices singing the song. I walk a few steps to the right and look into the dressing-cum-storage room to see if some of the juniors are chatting there, but it is empty. I walk around the rusty stairs and in front of the bathroom, lift the water containers lid and pour water into my mouth from the ause. Then I take off my sandals in front of the rehearsal room, open the door, enter the room and sit down on the floor among ten to 15 singing, young people. On my left side, in front of the small sitting crowd, is Sumanta-da playing the *taablaa*. In the opposite corner, under one of the two windows, Goutam-da plays the harmonium with an unlit Indian King cigarette in his hand. Between the two windows I see Swati-di reading through some poems on Xerox copies. The doors are opened again and Sir leans into the room. The music and the singing stop. Sir asks “*ki kore* (what are you doing)?” Goutam-da answers, “*Gokheeler songeet compose koreche* (we compose the music to the songs for Gokheel)”. Sir tells them that he expect the rehearsal on *Football* to start in 20 minutes and then he closes the doors while shouting a message to someone in the office. The music starts once again. And I have just entered a Nandikar rehearsal in Kolkata, India.

The rehearsals – the daily theatre practises – and the presence in Shyambazaar is something the informants use in order to describe themselves and others, as markers of identity. It is in the rehearsal room the socialisation of the members initially and mainly

takes place. Here they learn to use their body as a tool of expressing themselves through movements, speech, gestures and singing. The rehearsal room gets valorised through the practises as a place of intimacy, as an inner sanctum where they simultaneously have to bring their entire emotional repertoire and be willing to give it up.

Nandikar's place is situated in Northern Kolkata, in a *thaanaa* named Shyambazaar. This *baajaar* existed at least in 1757, if not earlier. Shobaram Basak founded the *baajaar*, but it was "named after Shyam Ray or Gobinda (Vishnu), associated with the goddess Kali now at Kalighat" (Nair 1990: 16). The English name for the *baajaar* was Charles Bazaar, a name given by Holwell (*ibid.*). To get there, one tells the ticket seller on the bus or a taxi driver that one wants to go to the Shyambazaar five-point crossing. This crossing consists of, as the name indicates, five roads meeting in a swirl of busy cars, slow trucks, full buses, speedy motorcycles, running pedestrians, shilly-shally bicycles and man-pulled carts. It is a place that is rarely mentioned in the newspapers unless there has been an accident or political gathering. The roads are of different sizes and they end in the crossing with a traffic circle. A low fence encircles the traffic circle and advertising signs telling about Maru cars, Indian King filter cigarettes, Coca Cola, Bata shoes, a newly opened private computing school and Aajkaal Patrikaa (a newspaper) cover the fence. Inside the fenced traffic circle is a red, larger-than-life statue of the beloved freedom fighter and nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose riding on a horse. The figurative statue depicts Bose as he rides northwards from Central Kolkata, up Bhupendra Bose Avenue. Bose is wearing a military uniform and he looks towards east, down DD Street.

Today this part of the city is the home of what usually is described as a conservative (meaning leftist, communistic) population. Generally, the inhabitants do not earn very much compared to the people in southern Kolkata or Bidhan Naagar. They live in blocks of flats, which have a fairly similar architecture. A typical block is made of concrete and is 4-5 floors high. The part facing the street on the ground floor is devoted to some form of commercial enterprise: a *photodokaan* (photo store); a *mistidokaan* (sweet shop); a fast food "restaurant" offering egg rolls and noodles or Xerox copy and telephone booths. The

remaining part of the ground floor is residential, as the upper floors. On the first floor there are *rawks* (verandas), often covering the entire length of the wall facing the street covering. The roofs are flat and easily accessible; it is an excellent place for drying clothes and kite flying. Decorations are limited or absent. The streets can be divided into major thoroughfares with pavements on each side, ordinary roads, usually with pavements on at least one side, and minor roads or walking paths. The motorised traffic is heavy on the major roads, rather limited on most of the ordinary roads, and almost absent on the minor ones.

Today, Shyambazaar is little more than the five-point crossing, a metro station and a street name. The *baajaar* that the name refers to is no more the centre of this part of Kolkata; today the five-point is the heart of Shyambazaar. Leave the statue behind and walk down Bose Avenue, one of the major thoroughfares of Northern Kolkata. Five minutes down this street, Shyambazaar Street swerves off diagonally on the left-hand side. Then there is only a minute walk before the Nandikar place is on the right hand side.

## **47/1 Shyambazaar Street**

It is the spatial arrangements that express the group's identity (its actual origins are often diverse, but the group is established, assembled and united by the identity of the place), and [...] the group has to defend against external and internal threats to ensure that the language of identity retains a meaning (Augé 1995: 45).

Nandikar's place, as a site, is already heavily valorised. It can be understood with reference to hierarchy and proximity to the centre where the different rooms have different values. The office is senior area and a place where juniors do not spend time when the seniors are present unless they have a specific task there. The combined dressing and storage room, as an area of the juniors, can be understood in opposition to the office. Since no seniors spend time here it is used as an indoor place of socialising between the younger participants. The rehearsal room is the site of the practical theatre-activities. With reference to the senior-junior hierarchy it is a mixed area, offering space to everyone participating. This place soon becomes a kind of second home to the most devoted participants. They spend a lot of

time here, more than they do in their proper homes. The juniors do not necessarily practise theatre work all the time; they also spend spare time here, meeting their colleges before going to a movie in the vicinity or just hanging around for a short hour. They all talk about “the Nandikar place” with affection, and the juniors with a certain amount of pride.

Nandikar rents the rooms for the annual amount of Rs 20 000 (3 200 NOK; 390 Euro). To enter the premises one has to choose between two entrances; one leading directly into the office and the second which brings one through a four meter long narrow aisle that ends in a small door on the right-hand wall that opens up in to the corridor-backyard. A junior will primarily use the latter entrance in order not to disturb the administrative work done in the office or not to be noticed while going out for a cigarette. Accordingly, the seniors will use the office entrance no matter what they are going to do. The office entrance is also the guest entrance. So let me start with entering the office; the one room that is most open to the outsiders and most closed to the juniors.

## **The Office – Administrative Nexus**

The office is a place of work and representation at the same time. When the daily work, at either Nandikar-organised workshops or in private jobs, is finished one will probably meet Sir first. Nandikar’s omnipresent Rudraprasad Sengupta is the most senior member and the President of the organisation. Sir is 66 years and lives in northern Kolkata together with his second wife Swatilekha. Sir is described within the group as the engine making everything moving, he has the necessary contacts within India and abroad, as well as the experience and the knowledge. As the major representative of Nandikar he is the most sought after when someone wants an interview, a speech and so on. Behind the desk is Jyoti-da, the one closest to Sir in the administrative work. He is 55 years old, a family father and works as a director in a bank. Still he spends almost every evening after long days in the office working with Nandikar. Among the established spending a lot of time in the office is Debbo-da and Goutam S-da. Debbo-da is 36 years old and has a master degree in biology. He lives in an extended household with his mother and four brothers with wives and children in Kolkata. Debbo-da is together with Gautam-da the major actor among the



established of Nandikar. He has worked extensively with the TIE-project, for the prostitutes and written several plays for children. In the beginning of his involvement with Nandikar his plan was to work in the office during the day and in the theatre in the evening. He soon realised that office hours are also the prime time for theatre work; consequently he decided to be a full time theatre activist. As a family father he has heavy responsibilities to earn a living for his wife and daughter. The consequence is his appearance in TV-serials. Occasionally Goutam-da is present in the office in the afternoons. Goutam-da is 35 years old; he lives together with his wife Jhulan-di, herself a central actor of Nandikar and their daughter in Bally, Howrah. He is working in a bank.

In the office there is a desk with an office chair behind it and another in front, a telephone in constant use, a typewriter, some shelves, a sofa and a chair in the same style. From this room all the activities are arranged. It is on one of these walls the calendar with the program is. It is here that Nandikar's National Theatre Festival is planned. It is in the office that the proper members discuss if they will arrange a requested workshop. No decision is totally a one-man decision. From around 4 or 5 in the afternoon to 9 in the evening the activity in the office is hectic. Some of the juniors are almost always present in the vicinity during this time, making models of a set, instructing and assisting carpenters making the set, or buying props for a new production. Some of the established may be present if there has been a day with an in-house workshop. When the seniors arrive, one of the juniors goes off to buy a glass of *caa* and perhaps further down the street if someone of the seniors wants *muri*, *paan*, *misti* or anything else to eat.

The juniors, who aspire to climb the ladder and perhaps become members themselves, are more often seen within the closest vicinity of the office. If there is an available seat they will perhaps sit or at least stand in the doorway. They want to be seen, but at the same time be out of the way. They want to help wherever they can, but they do not want to go for a simple thing as *caa*. Those who aspire to climb can approach any of the seniors. Others show their devotion through their acting and off-stage activities concerning a production.

The office is not just a place for administrative work. The seniors use it as their room for chatting, joking and discussing other topics than the life and future of Nandikar. If there are few people around, a senior might just sit and rehearse his part of a play together with a junior.

## **The Dressing Room**

In addition to the office, the rehearsal room and a toilet there is a combined dressing and storage room. It is without any windows, contains some shelves, a table and a chair and the bags, cloths and the participants' luggage. On one of the walls is a framed portrait of the before mentioned Bengali director-cum-playwright-cum-actor Sumbha Mitra. It is used as a storage room for old files, books and a few props. Those who need to change use it as a dressing room. But it is also one of the main indoor (backstage) arenas for the juniors. Here they are out of the way; here they can sit and stand, talk, joke and discuss.

If there is not a special holiday, or the group is out of town, one will probably find Susanta, Jahar, Bappa and Gautam B here every day and Subir a couple of days each week. They are juniors and devoted Nandikar participants. Susanta is 27 years and has a bachelor in drama. He lives in a two-rooms flat in a government owned building in Salt Lake, a somewhat prestigious area just outside Kolkata. He shares the flat with his parents and an older brother. In the flat next door his brother lives with his wife and their 3-year-old son. At the time of my Kolkata fieldwork he was not studying anymore, but he planned to continue – something he also did one year later. Jahar is 24 years old and studies drama at the Rabindra Bharati University where he works through his second year in the bachelor degree course. He lives across the Ganga in an extended family household, which consist of his mother and two brothers with their wives and children. As both a very active participant in Nandikar and a student he is a busy person with little, or no, spare time. To combine studies and theatre is hard and he often prioritises Nandikar to the cost of his studies. Subir is 24 and already a law graduate. He lives in a small one-room flat together with a friend in North Kolkata and works in a lawyer office in Central Kolkata. Originally he is from a small village in the district of Nadia. His employment takes most of the time

and makes it hard to participate in the rehearsals more than two to three afternoons a week. Bappa is 24 years old and lives in the North 24 Paragans with his family. With a bachelor in commerce he has previously been working for the Bank of America, Customer Service. He has only been with Nandikar for a year; still he is an actor with experience since he used to work with another group. Gautam B is a little older than most of the juniors. He has no parents left and lives together with his two brothers in a one-roomed flat in Shyambazaar. He earns some extra living from teaching yoga. Being nimble-fingered he has no problem sewing others' or his own shirts.

It is not so that they spend the entire day in the dressing room, they are present only for shorter periods during minor breaks, or before they leave in the end of the day. Here they are socialising as friends who are interested in what their mates have done in the morning, what they feel like doing tomorrow. Everyday talk dominates:

How do you feel? So-so. Why? [and] I watched *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* ('A River Called Titas', a film) yesterday, it was really good – to me Ritwik Ghatak (a famous Bengali art film director) equals Satyajit Ray (the most internationally acclaimed Bengali art film director). Yeah, that is a good one!

It is the dressing room, a private room and a place no one non-Nandikar needs to enter. It is a familiar and intimate room, a refuge from everything extraordinary and an enclosed breathing space where the main role is that of friends of equal status. The dressing room is not entirely a haven for the juniors, since they are within the reach of the seniors and the seniors might enter, for instance, to get a file or deliver a message. If so happens, the chatting stops and if someone is seated s/he will raise. Perhaps the message is to make the rehearsal room ready with the chair and the table as props or, if it is winter and cold, to roll out the carpet on the floor. The break is over and it is time for rehearsal.

## **The Rehearsal Room – Artistic Nexus**

Entering either through the office or the other entrance one will find oneself in a corridor. The corridor-backyard is in the centre of the rented place. It contains six different doorways and a spiral stair in the middle. From this place one can enter all the other rooms

and the upper floors and the narrow aisle described above. The rehearsal-room is part of the more private Nandikar areas and no one enters it without being invited, that is if one is not the *caa wallha* looking for empty glasses. The rehearsal room is a small, but illusory enlarged by a mirrored wall.

By the wall opposite the entrance, between the two windows facing the street Swati-di sits. She is 50 years old, from Allahabad in the state Uttar Pradesh and has a double first class in English literature. Swati-di is one of the most experienced members and an important person in the group. Her theatre experiences goes back to her childhood, when she was nourished with theatre and music. She is educated in both Western classical and Indian classical music. Her career as an actor has given her major roles in plays like *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* written by Berthold Brecht and directed by Sir and movies as *Ghare Bhaire* by Satyajit Ray. To her left is Gautam-da with a harmonium in front. Gautam-da is 38 years old and a bachelor in science. Previously he worked at the department of Railway, but resigned to devote all his time to theatre. He lives with his wife Sohini in his parent's house in South 24 Paragans. He has been described as "one of the greatest sons of Bengal", a name he earned through his solo performance of *Meghnad Bodh Kabya*. At this point he felt he had reach the limit for what he could accomplish as an actor. Needless to say, a few years later he is again alone on the stage in a new production he direct as well. Sohini has lived almost her entire 26 years long life with Nandikar; from the time when her mother Swati-di started to work with Nandikar, to the present where she carries major roles herself in Nandikar productions. She has already accomplished to bring home a National Movie Award as the best supporting female actor from her role in Aparna Sen's movie *Paramitar Ekdin* (2000). Another participant often seen in the rehearsal room is the already mentioned Jhulan-di. She is 35 years old and a graduate in English. At the time being she is performing one of the major roles in *Football*.

### **Ras of the Room**

The rehearsal room is a special site concerning the use and the impact of social rules and values. In the early afternoon there are usually only juniors here since the proper rehearsals

do not start before the evening. The juniors might exercise physically or theatrically on their own, work on a set, practise on an instrument or just relax. During the days with in-house workshops one of the younger seniors arrives around 3 or 4 p.m. together with the trainees. The trainees do not spend any time here after the workshops, unless they help out with something in connection to a production. The trainees have the lowest rank and are not even asked by the seniors to bring *caa*. They have absolutely nothing to do in the office and are seldom seen there.

When the in-house workshop is finished for the day, it is still some time until the proper rehearsal starts. Now the members not into administrative work and the juniors use the rehearsal room. The social amenities are informal and they might be practising parts not necessarily part of the repertoire. Individual initiatives are accepted and expected, and all kinds of questions can be asked. The strict hierarchy seen elsewhere does not flavour the social relations in the rehearsal room to the same degree.

When the actual rehearsal takes place the participants have their specific places to sit. The most senior ones sit along the window side, while the juniors are sitting narrowly together. The younger seniors sit wherever they feel like and they need not sit too cramped. Sir, Swati-di or Goutam-da usually directs during a rehearsal. They direct, but improvisation is wanted, needed and appreciated. In the practise to gain an understanding of, and a confidence in, the character they are playing several theories of characterisation are referred to, both *desi* (indigenous) and *bidhesi* (foreign), from Bharata-muni's philosophy of *ras* to Bertolt Brecht and alienation.

For Nandikar, one of the central goals is to create a performance that communicates some truths about what it means to be a human being and a part of society. The medium of the message is understood as universal or at least intellectual and emotional available to partakers with a minimum of education. In this respect Nandikar participants understand and describe their way (not language since they stress physicality) of acting as universal, as

almost globally available. This makes the rehearsal room a site where the intrusion, and understanding, of the global into the local takes place and vice versa.

## **A Global Junction**

Through the administrative task carried out in the office, the site becomes a global junction. Nandikar depends not only on founding from performances given in West-Bengal and India. For several years the participants received grants from the Ford Foundation (USA) supporting their workshops among street kids. And through performances they are invited to give abroad, they are able to sustain their funds. In this way Nandikar is part of an economy that is not reserved to state or national levels. The group receive some founding that can be seen as part of a global financescape – money that are labelled, so to speak, multi-cultural, international, transnational, or global, and are as such used to enhance “cultural” exchange across borders.

It is a proclaimed goal for Nandikar to accelerate and increase its involvement in international theatre activities, primarily to raise the activists own aesthetical standards through contact initiated either by them inviting other groups to their festival or by getting invited to other parts of the world. Secondly, through invitation abroad, like Europe, there is a potential to earn more money due to differences in exchange rates. They can change this payment in Kolkata in order to raise their standard of theatre through increasing the number of members that can spend their entire work capacity on Nandikar. Being part of a global flow of funds thus makes it possible for Nandikar to devote time to extra-performative activities like in-house workshops, activities that also are important in forming the group’s performative repertoire.

However, the mere presence of seniors within the office engaged in administration – of a travel to Göteborg and the use of the gained payment – and planning – “What if we perform Shanu during Göteborg Dance and Theatre Festival?” – combined with the fact that the office is used as the place where visitors are mainly accommodated increase the sense of the room as a junction of different global flows. It is important to realise that the

different global flows in different scapes (financial and artistic) that intersects normally do not create a disjunction as described by Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai is mainly focusing on the workings of global capital (1996; 1999) and how the flows of capital in financescapes are in a relation of disjuncture with flows in other scapes (ethno-, media-, techno- and ideoscapes) and “precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations” (1999: 231). I would not deny that this often is the case, but concerning Nandikar as described above, the junction between different scapes like financescapes and ideoscapes precipitate creative and practical possibilities. Taking a greater part in a global flow of founding makes it possible to dedicate more time to theatre and transcend former economical limitations in productions. The result could be that they are able to produce performances that again could attract a wider interest from, for instance, abroad. In this respect the Nandikar activists are privileged.

Perhaps the most significant global junction manifested through the practises of the activists in 47/1 Shyambazaar is the rehearsal room. The practises that lie behind this assertion will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Leaving the Site, Entering the Practises**

The rooms have different meaning to different persons of, and associated with, the group. The spatial organisation of the area as such tells us little about the everyday practises and experiences of the Nandikar participants. On the contrary, the use of the area, and the values given it through these activities, tells a lot. The reason for this is that it is ultimately through the human body and bodily practises the spatial fields of visual and environmental relationships are articulated (Garner 1994). How to use and behave in a given room varies according to your status in the group, and to whom are present and their status. In a simpler way it is possible to say that there are varying relations between individual and individual, and individuals and place. There are places, like the rehearsal room, where the social relations are different from for instance the office. It should then be possible to say that neither social relations nor place alone defines interaction, but the interplay between the two. The same constellation of persons interacts differently according to where they are

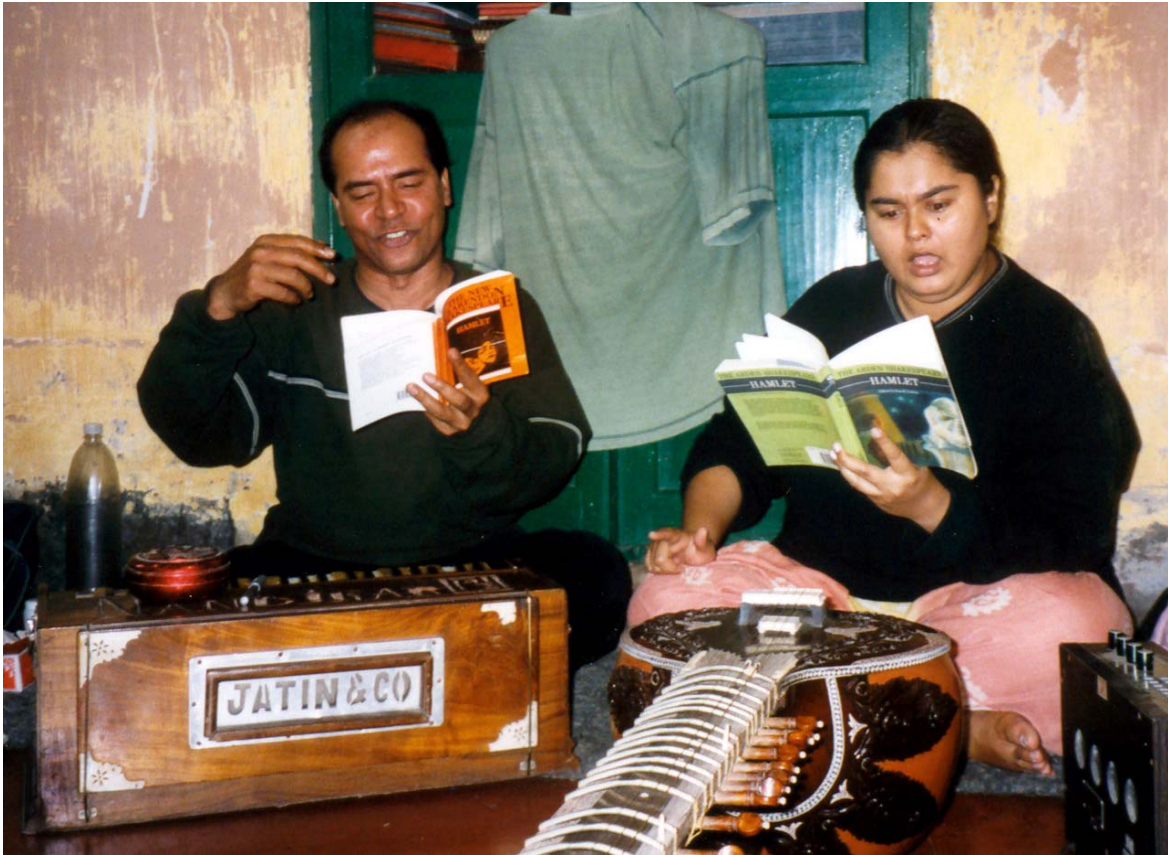
situated and at the same time the meanings ascribed to a place differs according to who are present.

There exists a strict hierarchy in the Nandikar organisation, a hierarchy based on prestige with reference to acting abilities and/or theatre knowledge, in addition to seniority.

Submission to this hierarchy is expressed through showing respect, to keep quite when a senior talks, to raise if a senior enters the room, to make sure s-he gets the chair, to give the most senior his/her glass of *caa* first, to make sure the seniors are given priority and, in general, to accept their way of doing “things”. Participants not respecting this system must in the end leave the group. To be a senior also implies responsibilities, they must make sure that the juniors learn and develop, and that they feel respected and affection. It must be stated that there is nothing special about this; it is not something that can only be understood with reference to Indian society. It is primarily the way most organisations are run world-wide, even if the hierarchy is more important and stressed in Nandikar than I am used to from a Norwegian context. Nandikar constitutes a hierarchic and democratic organisation. The social relations, and the flow of information in the interactions, are strongly affected by the hierarchical structure most of the time. The centre of this hierarchy is the office, and the control slowly loses its effect outside the house. There is only one breach in this, the rehearsal room. Even as it the established and the seniors that direct the rehearsals, everyone are given the possibility to contribute and voice their opinions. When the focus is on how people behave in special places, and how they experience different places, the rehearsal room stands out as a different place. The rehearsals constitute a break with the rules of interaction, and as a result the rehearsal room is used and experienced as an extraordinary site. The practises of the rehearsal room are the topic of the following chapter.



## 5 Rehearsal Musicality



Reading *Hamlet*

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the everyday practise of rehearsals. Rehearsals are viewed as a set of practises where different performative practises are introduced to the juniors. Among the performative practises, those that can be found as constituting global flows are emphasised, and the socialisation or re-culturation of the juniors is seen as processes of globalisation.

### Leaving Traces in the Bodies

Once the playwright David Selbourne asked master-director Peter Brook if he thought that:

the nature of the *creative moments* in rehearsal, when a so-far fleeting sense of discovery and illumination suddenly raises the spirits, and however briefly – suggest the ultimate possibility of

exhilaration in performance [...] and other experiences of rehearsal could be described, captured in words (Selbourne 1982: 39 in Schechner 2002: 202).

To this, Brook replied with some asperity, “Not at all. Of course not” (ibid). To capture the rehearsals in words is what I am now going to do.

The everyday practises of rehearsals expose the Nandikar participants to their most eager critics: their colleagues. Through acting out different characters, or states of being, they are expected to use their emotional repertoire, a repertoire that they have acquired and embodied through experience. They shall get in touch with the (em-bodied) emotional experiences of their own life and culture in order to use them as departure points for *gestalting* other’s principles. “Rehearsal”, Jahar – a junior – says, “is to push towards the limits of your feelings, to walk in the borderland of your emotions”. This is a practise that demands a deep trust in ones “co-travellers” since it implies that one, ideally, must expose oneself with all the pros and cons. The rehearsals are not randomly carried out; they are part of a socialising process of “re-culturation” through the introduction of a repertoire of performative practises the seniors have acquired. This repertoire of performative practises is acquired through contact: contact with other practitioners; contact with groups and theatre activists from the neighbourhood and abroad; contact with books written on the subject from all over the world; contact through being partakers in (every kind of) performances on and off stages in their everyday life in Kolkata or on visits abroad. The framing of the different performative practises, or the references to the “source” of the different practises taught, can be given explicit or not.

When the juniors learn the practises, they become (em-bodied) conceptual maps or images – making it possible for them to make sense of performances on and off the stage that they get engaged in. So when the famous Berliner Ensemble<sup>12</sup> visits Kolkata, and Nandikar is invited to a performance, they are able to relate to the performative expressions in another

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<sup>12</sup> Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel founded the Berliner Ensemble in 1949. Heiner Müller's production of Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, with Martin Wuttke playing the title role, is one of the most successful in the history of the Berliner Ensemble. It was with this production the Ensemble visited Kolkata during my stay.

way than those who have not themselves experienced or lived through the “same” practises. As framed practises this “exposing” within the group gets embodied as identity forming. The emphasis is again on the performers engaging with each other, outsiders and the physical surroundings. The result is that the rehearsal almost becomes the critical and liminal phase in theatre. In Turner’s studies with explicit reference to theatre, the actual performance in front of partakers constitutes the critical and liminal phase (Turner 1982). This difference is attributed to the diverging goals of his and my studies. While a central aspect in Turner’s performance studies is to elaborate theatre’s place and function within societies at large, my objective is to focus on the members of a single group as they experience their place within societies at large.

“I want the students (juniors) to become athlete-philosophers”, Sir says, referring to the term usually attributed to Aristotle. And he adds: “The artificial divorce of body and mind, the emphasis of mind over body, must be bridged.” This should be understood as a never-ending quest, only a few, if any, will achieve a complete bridging of the gap. Rehearsals are engagements with a multitude of different performative traditions; it is a planned practise where the participants are induced to gorge themselves in as well Indian as *bideshi* (non-Indian) performative practises on both the level of theory and practise. Through their introduction to “a world of flows” (Appadurai 1996; 1999) where different performative practises are in motion, the juniors learn to “imagine” in a collective way, creating a distinct form of Nandikar imagination that is subjected to, and engaging with, forces of globalisation.

Among the practises, plays and theories that becomes manifested through rehearsals are plays of William Shakespeare, Brechetian and Sanskrit theatre, Cartesian versus Hindu dualism, European versus Indian concepts of individuality and Willy Russell. Information about these practises and theories, lived on through performances or found in books, constitute flows that are of an global character, since the information can be found and utilised in every part of the world regardless of nations or borders. Together these flows constitute theatrescapes, the landscape of persons who define themselves with reference to

performative practises and theories that are distributed across larger parts of the world, stages, theatre halls or play-places, and the need of partakers in order to make theatre. In relation to the scapes of Appadurai, theatrescapes can be described with references to mainly mediascapes – the distribution of capabilities to produce and disseminate information, which are available to a large group people throughout the world and the images of the world created by these media – and ideoscapes – which often are political and frequently have to do with ideologies of states and counterideologies, the scapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview with images like freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representations and democracy (Appadurai 1996: 35-4).

Following Appadurai, through their rehearsals within Nandikar, the juniors' faculty of imagination make it possible for them to consider themselves as theatre activists that are part of the World of Theatre. As someone who can engage in performative practises from almost all over the world, and as someone who starts to experience the world as also his or her domain. To paraphrase Appadurai (1999) as he continues: on the one hand, it is in and through imagination that the juniors are taught, disciplined and controlled, by the proper members and their ideas of what Nandikar theatre should be like. But it is also the faculty through which collective patterns of dissent and new practises of performance for the group at large emerge. "The imagination is today a staging ground for action, not only for escape" (Appadurai 1996: 7).

Most of the juniors say that their love of theatre is the love of performing on stage in front of partakers. The performance is that which is important in their life as theatre activists. "Rehearsing is work, performing is play", they say. However, this does not mean they do not enjoy rehearsals or that they do not see the importance of it.

## **Just Another Day**

To the juniors of Nandikar, who devote most of their time to theatre, the process of warm-up and rehearsal begins with the call bell ringing in the morning. A regular day to many of

the juniors can start like presented below; an example constructed on the basis of several narratives told to me by the juniors:

When Anil's call bell rings in the morning most of the neighbours have left the neighbourhood to go to work. He wakes up alone in the bed he shares with his older brother in their parents' two-room apartment. The bedroom is the inner room. It is the nicest room in the apartment; here is a small shrine on a shelf that also contains different books and framed pictures, the TV with a VCR connected and a cassette-radio rack. There are pictures without frame on the wall; a picture of snow-clad mountains in Switzerland, a page from a calendar. His mother enters the room with a glass of *caa*, and before he has really woken up he grabs a book from the shelf behind the head end of the bed. He pulls himself up in the bed – now sitting – and reads from the *The Wild Duck*. Later that day he discusses Dr. Relling's character with me. He gets more awake and starts to wonder how Stanislavski's system could have transformed the dead words to living art, how he could have build a character of Relling. The transformation should be total. The illusion of being presented with a new kind of truth. A small piece *lila* of *maya* should have opened the *sthayi bhavas* of people in a way that even would have made Abhinavagupta taste all the *ras* in transcendental bliss. The glass of *caa* is empty, the breakfast over. Anil raises and walks to the bathroom. A washtub is filled to the brim with water, and he squats on the floor. Grabbing a plastic mug, he fills it with water and pours the water over himself. He starts to rub soap on his body. When he finish his bath, he dresses up in a pair of black jeans and his new, grey, Lee T-shirt. He smiles satisfied; the T-shirt was a good purchase and definitely no fake rip-off. It will keep its shape and colour for a long time. The smell of hot food reaches him; soon lunch will be ready. Anil is an actor and soon he has to leave. And that makes it important to eat some real, filling food, because he will probably not get a proper meal until he gets home in the night. Waiting, he lowers himself to the floor, seats himself by the harmonium. He tries to practice on it as often as possible before he leaves. The right hand fingers moves slowly on the keys while he pumps with his left hand and when the sound starts escaping the instrument, he starts to sing. It is a

*tagoresangeet* and he makes a new melody for it. He remembers a dance sequence from Hritik Roshans (young up-and-coming male film star) latest movie, *Mission Kashmir*, which he saw together with Jahar and Bappa during a break in the preparations for *Football*, and he creates a choreography to his new melody. He changes his melody slightly to give more emphasis to the rhythm, speeding it up.

A short time later he leaves the house, walks down to a nearby round-point and a bus stop. Halfway through a cigarette the bus arrives. No *mohila* (woman) is waiting for this bus, so the bus driver does not stop, he just slows down a little and Anil jumps onto the bus together with a couple of other young men. Twenty minutes later and he gets off the bus in the middle of Shyambazaar's five-point crossing. A short walk later he arrives 47/1 Shyambazaar Street and Nandikar's place.

What is local and what is not? What is an integrated part of the culture and what is an alien element? Should Ibsen and Stanislavski be removed in order to portray the true Kolkatan living? And if so, by whom? What about the harmonium he plays? The TV he uses to watch MTV on? Who is to decide that those are not "natural" to him and others? The plays of Ibsen are probably a more integrated part of a Kolkatan theatre activist's experience of self- and group-identity, than it is to an average Norwegian<sup>13</sup>. And it is likely that the knowledge of Stanislavski is better among an "educated" actor usually performing in Kolkata, than it is to an educated Russian who has a store in Moscow. A Norwegian might find it amusing to experience that Ibsen's plays often are staged by Kolkata groups, that *they* have appropriated "it" from the Norwegian cultural heritage and are performing "it" in a playhouse with palms on the outside, encircled with speeding Ambassador taxis and eager auto-rickshaws. To the foreigners the performance may be experienced as truly exotic and an anomaly, something that do not fit and is unexpected. What does not "fit" depends on the gazers perspective, the exotic is produced from outside through the gaze. In the following paragraphs I will pursue the claim that globalisation does not imply un-naturalisation, the increase of artificial and detached living.

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<sup>13</sup> For a story of a Kolkatan staging *Peer Gynt* in the South Indian state Karnataka see Bharucha 2000: 78-107

The rehearsals of Nandikar bring the World of Theatre into the rehearsal room and the life of the juniors. It is here most of them get introduced to different ways of conceptualising divergent performative practises, with reference to, for example, alienation and *ras*. “If you really want to look at the Director and not appear as you are really part of a football crowd, I will tell you to do it”, the instructor says. And gives a short introduction to Brechtian alienation contra Stanislavskian involvement. As the rehearsals go on, stories from Nandikar past and present are told. Stories about encounters with different theatre groups and personalities from India and abroad, from tours to other cities, how the groups was received and what other plays the participants have seen. After visits abroad they learn about alternative rehearsal practises, about how other groups approach a play and their ways of performing. Stories like these make their theatre a nexus for different global flows; the trainees are constantly reminded that their theatre practise is part of a set of practises that are found “everywhere”. They are taught to understand themselves as members of a global community, a community that they do not see, but that they are repeating the practises of. Another side of this is the presence of me, a fieldworker from Norway. I too become a mark of both Nandikar’s place in a World of Theatre and its global appeal.

## **Acting Out**

The rehearsals proper take on many different forms. There can be phases when one reads a text in the group either to see if they really want to make it into a performance and later, if they plan to turn it into a performance, to learn the text by heart. There are rehearsals where they focus on the body, songs, dance sequences or go through complete parts of a play with or without interrupting comments. The Nandikar rehearsals are often very open-ended, in the sense that improvisation on an individual as well as a collective basis is requested and rewarded. Tedious repetitions of single scenes, where different ways of behaviour are tested and responded to by the other actors, are made constantly. When one way of “doing it” fall into place and make sense there is always room for a continued search – there is never one truth in interaction, in theatre. Even after a new performance is made public on stage, the workshop like “breaking down, digging deep, and opening up”

(Schechner 2002: 202) approach to rehearsals are continued, insofar they have enough time.

It is important to notice at this point that Nandikar has approximately ten plays it may stage. Since it, as every Kolkata-based Group Theatre troupe but one, has no stage of their own, it does not perform a single play in one theatre for some considerable time. Consequently, between the performances of a given play there can be weeks and months. The latest productions are the ones performed most frequently, but even these – the new and regularly performed ones – are rehearsed persistently. When the participants are rehearsing a new play they soon operate with a deadline, a date for the first night show. Nevertheless, there is an agreement that the group will never stage a play that it is not satisfied with.

The workshop-like approach to rehearsals is emphasised within the group, but with different explanations. One told me that they carried through these long periods of workshop rehearsals in order to explore the truths that can be found in performative interaction. The rehearsals are, in opposition to the ones done by especially American and European groups, more a search for true theatre, than work that has to be done with necessity before public performances. An opposing view was that these workshop rehearsals had to be there since the participants of Nandikar and other Group Theatres of India are not professional. Hence, the “Western” actors have better education and the possibility to work more extensive than their Kolkata-based colleagues. Thus, Nandikar’s workshop rehearsals are a result of semi-professional actors without a long standardised acting education. Which of these views is correct is hard to say, my impression is – rather diplomatic – that the truth lay somewhere in between.

The usual, according to Schechner, process of staging a play goes from workshop to rehearsal to production (2001). Roughly speaking this is also true for Nandikar, but the boundaries are more fuzzy. The investigative and improvisatorial aspects of the workshop are important aspects in all Nandikar rehearsals and this is important to many of the actors.



The playfulness of improvisation, the joy of exploring new ways of re-acting, the excitement of pushing emotional limits make the rehearsals more than tedious repetition and revision – and creative moments more frequent. The satisfaction when a new tone and gesture is given to a character after a period of practising at home, and the rest of the group notice it and really appreciate ones endeavour makes theatre worthwhile despite little payment, hard work and uncertain future prospects. When we went home in the evening after rehearsals discussions about improvisation, surprising changes made be one or the other, was the most frequent topic:

“Did you notice that I changed that part when my character is bullied by Hari?” Susanta asks me, “I have never reacted in that way before. I think Goutam-da got surprised and liked it. What do you think? Was it better before or should I continue with this?” This time I had, to Susanta’s satisfaction, noticed the changes. I say I enjoyed it, it made the character not just a loser – but also a fighter, at least a character with a hidden fighter within.

Stressing the workshop like approach in Nandikar rehearsals does not imply that the rehearsals are out of focus, not serious, without a plan, casual, or otherwise done in a random way that almost by chance results in a finished performance. The rehearsals of Nandikar are like the rehearsals of most groups “tailored to the specific needs of the performance-at-hand” (Schechner 2002: 202). Let me now turn to read-through rehearsals and then to rehearsals proper.

### **Shakespeare in the Rehearsal Room**

Read-through rehearsals are important when one starts to rehearse a new play, since it is through this most aspects of the text are discussed, making sure that everyone has an understanding of everything from single words and sentences, to chapters and the entire play as a whole. The main objective reading the text is to learn it by heart. A read-through contains almost as much dramatisation as a more performative rehearsal. During my stay with Nandikar I never participated in a read-through as a preparatory study to a play the

activists had decided to stage. I only observed read-through of plays already part of their repertoire and participated in readings of *Hamlet* in English as Horatio<sup>14</sup>.

The *Hamlet* readings were not meant as preparation of a production of this play, at least in the immediate future. The reading of *Hamlet* was more a project of enlightenment for those unfamiliar with the play in its original language, than a preparation of a forthcoming public performance that some of the actors dreamt about. Reading any text, reading *Hamlet*, is to everyone an enlightening and instructive practice. Irrespective of Shakespeare's place, or lack of it, in the consciousness of Britons and Europeans today, it is and will always be one of the many important building stones making the fuzzy fundament of the "that culture of the West". Shakespeare is one of many windows into European societies and to read *Hamlet* with insight is in many cases as good an approach to various manifestations of culture as the fieldworker's. Knowledge is to everyone, in every society, something that is more or less unevenly distributed (Barth 2002), to know something about some of the building stones is all that is expected of, for instance, the European citizen. Several of the Nandikar participants have Master degree in English and know the English canon. In addition, among the participants there are several experienced with European literature and/or European countries through visits. The remaining without this knowledge get introduced to it through their read-through rehearsals of plays like *Hamlet*, due to the ongoing explicit elaboration and interpretation of the meaning of unfamiliar words and unknown practises mentioned in the text. Anyone who reads Shakespeare for the first time knows how depended one is on an elaborated notation in order to understand what the given text is all about. A first time reading of *Hamlet* takes time; it is a process of asking, of reading footnotes, of making sense.

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<sup>14</sup> There is a double irony in this, since *Hamlet* takes place when Denmark is on alert because of a threat from the Norwegian prince, Fortinbras, to invade Denmark and recover certain territory, at the same time Horatio (my character) is a scholar and a chronicler of the story. Horatio is the voice that will speak the story after all the participants are dead, the one Hamlet choose to tell his story to the rest of the world. He is the one true and fast friend, and, as such, the only one with whom Hamlet can be completely "himself", without acting, feigning madness, pretending emotions he does not feel, and without the subtle and not-so-subtle edge of irony, sarcasm, anger and despair that underlies his relationships with every other character. What a sublime way to make fun of the Norwegian anthropologist *in spe*.

Reading a play like *Hamlet* is not only about understanding a new play, it is also – due to its elevated place in (modern, urban) theatre in almost every corner of the world – a *rite de passage*, initiating the participants into the World of Theatre and a community of actors that know no state borders. Important here is that entering the world community of theatre is not based on one fixed, canonical, understanding of the given play, but on the actual and experiential knowledge that “I have read Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and acted out some of the scenes”. It is the individual experience of having done the same as other actors worldwide have done that is important. If one has acquired one of the canonical understandings that is fine, but nothing more. The World of Theatre offers many perspectives upon similar packages of information.

Like there are playwrights that are global property and can be described as an identity marker – self descriptive and in the eyes of people outside theatre – world wide, there are of course playwrights that can be described as necessary acquaintances for an actor to be part of theatre communities or be it nation, state, city or neighbourhood level. In Bengal the first requirement is to know your Tagore. Tagore is both their pride and one of the most important national or Bengali marks of identity. To Nandikar’s participants it was mainly the songs of Tagore more than his plays that left traces in their bodies. They said that to learn and to sing the *rabindrasangeet* is a good way to participate in, and to reflect upon, a common understanding of Bengali sentiment. A sentiment celebrating both the Bengali countryside and the life there, and the old Bengali traditions of language, poetry and music, together with an urge to take the best from different traditions in order to create something new and better.

### **Body Control**

If Sir and the seniors get it their way, Susanta and the other juniors are going to be athlete philosophers - actors that is going to create a vibrating image making it possible to reflect on living, the fundamental condition, the past, the present, the future, the society at large. In order to accomplish this, physical fitness has been given equal status to intellectual

approaches. In fact, they are not seen as separate, but as interwoven, as non-dualistic when it comes to becoming a good actor. The physical exercise is mainly done individually and are simply exercises done in order to strengthen and soften the muscles, in addition to make the participants restore the body's position as an integrated part of engagement, thus regaining identification with their own bodies.

In Swati-di's book on theatre games she has added a short piece written by Tagore named *The Art of Movement in Education* as one of the appendixes (Sengupta 2000). It dwells around the repression of movement in the school, and how to repress this natural behaviour must also affect the abilities to learn the syllabus. Using Tagore's essay could easily be interpreted as a reminder to overcome through performative practises the way the "society" uses the body to as a site for regulation, discipline and control (Bourdieu on socialisation through embodiment, "*the socially informed body*" (1977: 124); Scheper-Hughes and Lock on *body politics* (1987); Foucault on extreme forms of society subordinating the individual body (1979)), the "imprinting of social categories on the body-self" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 25). To rehearse on re-gaining control over ones own body is done so that the participants are able to become part of the group and contribute to it. Overcoming the ways one is taught to use the body can be seen in at least two additional divergent ways. First it can be seen as a way to create new ways of conceptualising the body in a way that are controlled by the seniors and as such represent a tool to socialise the trainees in a way that suits their purpose. But on the other hand, the re-culturation or re-socialisation process may be a way to challenge hegemonic discourses since the seniors teaches new ways of using and conceptualising the body in an explicit opposition to the ways promoted by the school and society at large. This becomes plausible when accepting the statement that "the universalised natural body [i.e. the body that are promoted by the "society"] is the gold standard of the hegemonic social discourse" (Haraway 1990: 146). Like the possibilities of imagination stated by Appadurai (1999), the re-conceptualisation of the body, which the juniors are guided through, creates possibilities for both control and dissent. New repertoires of bodily behaviour – of em-bodying old practises in new ways – is brought into the rehearsal room from Bengali and foreign theatre practises, from sub-groups and

movies. The use of dance in many of the plays in order both to emphasis states of being and make the play more visual and colourful is an example of this. Dance sequences are part both of the *jatra*, Tagore's theatre and Bollywood movies and it constitutes a significant demarcation between communication as promoted by the school versus the theatre. In the continuation of altering the relation to the body, the juniors learn that they can tell stories with many languages through their body.

### **Emotion Surveys**

Most of the rehearsals I observe, and subsequently participate in, take for granted that the actors know the text. To know the text of their character(s) also mean that one has an idea of who this person is and what his/her place in the play is. With this knowledge from individual and group read-through-rehearsals the rehearsal can start:

It is 7 p.m. and Sir opens the door into the rehearsal room. Today they will continue to rehearse this season's new production, which is going to be staged for the first time during the Festival. The play is a Hindi version of one of their former successes *Football*. There are 14 people already in the room and the two juniors who still sit in the door way move hastily so that Sir does not have to step over them. Swati-di picks up a few sheets, makes space for Sir on the floor. The room is warm and humid; two fans make the air move a little, inducing an illusion of a refreshing breeze. Goutam B. gets up and fetches several copies of the play from one of the two integrated bookshelves. He distributes one to Sir and Swati-di, one to Goutam-da and the rest evenly around.

Goutam-da wants them to go through the first scene with its dance and singing act a couple of times. He says it was not done properly last time, and since this is the actual beginning of the play it is crucial that the disorderliness of the *Football* crowd are presented in such a smooth and orderly way that the partakers will not stop reflecting over the groups presentation. Swati-di and Sir agrees. The juniors raise, shake their limbs and gets in line facing Sir, Swati-di and the two windows. Goutam-da fills the harmoniums bellow with air and Sumanta-da nods; he is ready

to play on the tabla. One of the actors starts his line, the crowd answers and the music, song and dance part starts and – “*Pas! Pas! Stop!*,” – Goutam-da interrupts the juniors. He turns toward Swati-di and Sir, and complains about the uneven and unfocused acting. He turns towards the juniors and asks them to concentrate on “the explosion” the singing and dancing scene shall start with. They are here not to chat and enjoy, but to rehearse, and the rehearsal has already started. Sir agrees and asks them to remember that they are a bursting *Football* mob. Swati-di corrects a mispronunciation she had heard; Hindi is a language few of them master and which most of them have started to learn as part of this production. Two of the juniors repeat in a low voice the phrase Swati-di corrected. They get ready for a new repetition; shake their limbs and gets in line. This time they go through the scene until the part where Sir’s character is supposed to enter the front stage. It works better, they repeat the part once more – a few corrections on the level of loudness in different parts are made and they get ready for a go through of the entire scene. The juniors shake their limbs and gets in line while Sir raises and walks behind them. They rehearse through the entire scene, Swati-di makes a few notes on words and parts where she is not satisfied with the pronunciation, connotation, the acting. She directs the others when they are finished. Goutam-da supports her comments, Sir steps behind the line again. The last but one repetition of the scene; this time with several interruptions and remarks. Debbo-da enters the room, the juniors make space for him to walk across and he sits down in under the left window. Limbs are shaken and juniors get in line and the evening’s last repetition of this scene is completed without any interruptions.

Rehearsals often consist of monotonous repetitions. Repetitions of simple patterns of behaviour are supposed to enforce bodily confidence. In a choreographed dance and song scene like described above, the seniors in charge often have a clear vision of what the result shall look and sound like. At the same time it is necessary to rehearse hard in order for the group to act as unity, to synchronise. Acting an angry crowd do not implicate that every movement should be the same, only that they must correspond. It turns out to be like arranging a piece of music where every instrument is not playing the same lines, but is

building on each other. Again there is the stress of an individuality that is tuned in reference to the others. The juniors' duty is to act out their characters at the same time as they are constantly aware of the other characters acting. This is a way of relating to acting that also is promoted in the living tradition of *Natyasastra* (Schechner 2001, I will return to this in chapter 7). This way of relating to the character is found among many theatre groups around the world, and watching other performances the juniors might look after if the actors are able to watch themselves and the others act. They were not able to verbalise what they look after, but display of bodily control seemed important.

There is a short break; no one leaves the room but Sumanta who disappears for five minutes in order to fetch *caa* for the seniors. The copies of the play are opened; they will start with the school scene where Hari bullies one of his class mates, gets belted by the teacher which he and the rest of the class subsequently beats up. The scene is accomplished with an emphasis on Hari's bullying of his schoolmate. They both improvise different "versions" of the situation, to great joy for the others, without finalising any special version. Sir speaks a little about the importance of even minor characters and to give the other schoolmates, for instance, a history of their own. They also have to have a presence on stage that is in accordance with the play; that makes them believable and the background that is necessary in order to make the conflict between Hari, his schoolmate, the teacher and the entire schooling situation visible. They are instructed to act out characters which also could act and re-act in situations other than this one.

Ability to re-act as a character is a result of repeated improvisation. The character is supposed to be embodied in such a way that the actor is able to re-situate in a very short time. This does not mean the actor must become the character; in fact this is only the simplest solution and not the best. Ideally, the actor is supposed to be above or outside the entire scene – be aware of what is happening as an actor, not only the character. Such an outside view from the actor makes it possible for her to evaluate the acted situation, to judge the re-acting. In situations like this there can be made references to Stanislavskian acting and how that can be used to acquire a history to characters. This again get

superimposed on an understanding of having a third perspective on the character, either with reference to Brecht or to an Indian philosophical idea of characterisation defined by a god's view – from where the acting is perceived from the outside. This latter stance also implies a dualism, but not like the Cartesian. The mind, or parts of it, and the body are united, but parts of the *bodh* (intellect/consciousness) are given the possibility to transcend the body/mind-unity (a similar case is given by Halliburton: 2002).

The important issue here is the non-problematic change between references made to stress different performative practises. In this respect both Brecht and Bharata-muni are seen as equal resources which can be utilised with the same easiness. It is possible to take the interpretation even further. While being aware of the “current tendencies to discover ‘exotic’ peoples who live in the body” (Halliburton 2002: 1131) as a part of anthropological endeavour to transcend its own inherit, Cartesian dualism and that a similar dualism in India also has roots in Indian philosophies and folk theories, it is likely that the kind of dualism Nandikar is fighting against is rooted in a modernity with reference to Descartes' dualism, in other words a modernity that has its inception in European philosophy.

This Cartesian dualistic stance became an integral part of the syllabus taught in schools and at universities both in Europe and Kolkata. When the Bengali upper class acquired British moulded education from the beginning of the 19-century and re-created dualism within this new frame, the dualism that was imposed in order to “guarantee” the possibility of scientific knowledge also became part of the indigenous conceptual maps (Chatterjee 1997). Accepting that Nandikar tries to transcend a Cartesian and modern dualism, the actors' rehearsal endeavours can be interpreted as a new way of relating to their present and as such as craving out an alternative modernity (Gaonkar 2001).

After a longer break of 20 minutes with *caa*, and a cigarette for those who smokes, we return back to the rehearsal room through the second entrance. Some of the seniors are in the office having their *caa* and cigarette. Inside the rehearsal room



Swati-di is still sitting together with Julan-di and another woman. The juniors enter the room and five minutes later the rehearsal of *Football* is about to continue. This time they rehearse the scene where Hari's sister makes a wish for a song to a radio station and dreams about her lost past. Julan-di plays the sister and she is supposed to enter the stage with a radio in one hand and the telephone in the other – telling her song request to the Compere. She gives her request, sings with the song – inviting us into her never realised dreams of a kingdom come.

It is an important scene since it is the introduction to the bourgeoisie aspiring part of Hari's family, his sister and her husband. There is little movement in the scene that can carry the meaning to the partakers. Through the minimal movements while standing still and her voice we shall get a glimpse of her dream as a disavowal of her present situation, and her safe and solid marriage. She is materially secured through her husband, but she knows somewhere inside that he never can be her path to a happy and meaningful living.

Then, when her husband suddenly enters while she is singing the signature tune of her character's dreams, she feels like she has been caught in an act of infidelity. And this is the emotion, the feeling, the situation, the message that must be communicated to the partakers – and Sir is not satisfied with the way it is sought accomplished this time. The scene gives only small possibilities to communicate given emotions. After the third repetition Sir gets louder in his voice, forcing through a sense of discomfort in the rehearsal room. The concentration is deep among everyone.

Based on what I have learned from other rehearsals and talks, I believe Sir tries to induce into the actor the feeling that she has betrayed him, her mentor, and thereby instigate an emotional state similar to that of betraying her husband. And thus make her get in touch with the state of being she must know in order to incorporate or embody this into her character in a reflected way.

The atmosphere is condensed; the sound from the fans is vanishing. The room becomes the guided survey of the emotional frontier we are witnessing, the push toward the actor's borders. We, the partakers, become the interior or a secure harbour, but we are off-limit in our concentration. The borders are the only place

given to the actor, she remains unsecured, undefined, out of place in the quest Sir is forcing her to follow. She walks the two meters back to the mirrored wall, turns around and act her entry – again and again – while Sir is loudly displaying his dissatisfaction with her treatment of the acting trade. Tears in her eyes. I turn my head in order to get eye contact with Subir – sees the blood has left most of the faces around me – his gaze is fixed upon the scene taking place in front of him. “This is it. This is the quest of an actor. To live on the borders of your limitations in every way in order to achieve a better understanding of life, in order to become a *bhaalo maanus*, a good person”, he was thinking, he tells me in retrospective fifteen minutes later, rehearsals over, while we sweaty lit a cigarette to share.

This case describes what can be labelled a border survey-situation, a situation when deep and private emotions are stressed in order to surpass the everyday rehearsals “fleeting sense of discovery” to reach a “creative moment” of engagement (Schechner 2002: 202). Situations like this do not occur daily, but happen sporadically.

Generally these situations incorporate one junior and a dissatisfied senior. Several juniors can be involved in the survey as helpers, but are seldom made the focal point. These are not emotional outbursts from the seniors, but integrated parts of the workshop like rehearsals of this group. Every survey is initiated by one senior who pushes the junior(s) towards his or her emotional borders. Sometimes the senior uses some of the other seniors to support his or her views. No one has a copyright to this workshop-like approach. It is simultaneously a property and a way of practise that cannot be described as localised in one place. Even if, as in many textbooks on either rehearsal or theatre, workshops are ascribed as symptomatic for post-Second World War avantgarde<sup>15</sup> theatre in Europe and America, it does not mean they have been imported from that tradition.

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<sup>15</sup> Avantgarde traditionally referred to the foremost part of an army group, the vanguard, but with reference to art it came to denote a group that actively experiments with and applies new and unconventional techniques. Among these techniques are workshops as an approach to performances. Avantgarde is thus partly defined with references to workshops.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that workshops is a very common field of contact between spatially diverged groups, since it is often a way of working informally with performances. When Nandikar is invited abroad it is usually to give performances where the participants display to the partakers their plays, to give lectures on different “theatre topics” to an audience, or to arrange or participate in workshops where there are no pure partakers or audience but participants and co-performers. Workshops become a site where actors meet, and exchange experiences of performative practises and methods. Workshops as such are something that many actors that are situated in a performative tradition of a global theatrescape are familiar with and which they can communicate through. One does not have to be a Kolkatan theatre activist in order to relate to emotional border-surveys, it is a field of experience most actors are familiar with. And since this practise is not an ordinary practise most people go through sometime during their life as part of education or work, it becomes a marker of difference. Workshops and emotional border-surveys provide experiences that demarcate “us” within the World of Theatre from those outside. “Us and them” in theatre knows not necessarily any nation-state borders.

Occasionally, there are references to different theoretical grounded practises of characterisation, voice, movements, etc, historic and contemporary acknowledged practises from all over the world. It is not imperative, but expected that the juniors acquire such information either through studies at college/university or reading on an individual basis. While many of the participants of Nandikar knows a lot about theoretical grounded practises, knowledge they use in their acting, the rehearsals can be said to be themselves theoretically grounded in a way which emphasis a nondualistic body-mind, physical approach to theatre. It is through workshop-like rehearsals the participants shall find paths to search for their art, to grasp a little part about what it is to be human, and to learn to communicate this to partakers in a way the partakers will appreciate.

It must also be mentioned that during the rehearsal there are discussions of lighting, sound and the set. Most sides of the performance are thus done within the entire group, even as most of the juniors have nothing to say about these matters.

### ***Shanu Roy Chowdury: Learning from the Learned***

A new day, and on the schedule is a repetition of *Shanu* before the following day's performance at the Academy.

The rehearsal is not about to start before around 7 p.m., but in the meantime Swati-di and Goutom-da have entered the rehearsal room together with five juniors. It is time for unpretentious and playful informal rehearsal or practising. Perhaps some music to a song for the Gokhel Girls has to be composed, a dance sequence has to be tested, or some play is read. According to the juniors, this is perhaps the best time of the day, that is, if they are not going to perform that evening.

Around 7 p.m. Swati-di starts to rehearse through her solo performance *Shanu Roy Chowdury*. Goutam-da has left and she stands alone in the middle of the room with the juniors present. Both Jahar and Susanta have a manuscript, they are correcting whenever Swati-di says something wrong or forgets a part. Swati-di is not using any of the props during the rehearsal that she uses during the performance.

Swati-di rehearsing *Shanu* is as at least as much a rehearsal for the juniors present as it is for her. The play is an adaptation of Willy Russell's play *Shirley Valentine* (1988). The original play was about an ordinary middle-class English housewife. Preparing chips and egg for dinner, she evaluates her life, talks to the wall about such subjects as her husband, her children, her past and the attractive offer she has received from a girlfriend to go with her on holiday to Greece in search of romance and adventure. Should she leave, what would her husband say, would he manage without her? Her husband shuns the chips and egg, and thus makes the decision easy for Shirley. She accepts her friend's offer, and goes to Greece leaving nothing but a note and some ready-made food in the freezer. There she has an "adventure" with a Greek restaurant owner and decides to stay in Greece. In the end, her husband is on his way to try to retrieve her bank. And she dreams of sitting at her table by the sea, saying to him: "Hello. I used to be the mother. I used to be your wife. But now, I'm Shirley Valentine again. Would you like to join me for a drink?" Valentine being her pre-marriage family name. The Bengali adaptation is about an upper middle-class Bengali

housewife. Preparing *aluu dum* for dinner, she evaluates her life, talks to the wall about such subjects as her husband, her children, her past and the attractive offer she has received from a girlfriend to go with her on holiday to Pokhara in Nepal in search of romance and adventure. Should she leave, what would her husband say, would he manage without her? Her husband shuns the *aluu dum*, and thus makes the decision easy for Shanu. She accepts her friend's offer and goes to Pokhara leaving nothing but a note and some ready-made food in the freezer. There she has an "adventure" with a Nepali restaurant owner and decides to stay in Pokhara. In the end, her husband is on his way to try to retrieve her back. And she dreams of sitting at her table by the lake, saying to him: "Hello. I used to be the mother. I used to be your wife. But now, I'm Shanu Roy Chowdhury again. Would you like to join me for a glass of Pepsi?" Roy Chowdhury being her pre-marriage family name. The changes in the adaptation were minor, but the impact it made varied. In England the play was appreciated as both a serious topic for discussion as well as a comedy. In Kolkata the topics were too hot to be described as a comedy, even with the evident and appreciated humoristic parts making all groups of partakers laugh.

During the rehearsal Swati-di dominates the room completely, leaving no space for the juniors to move. They sit concentrated, following every word, making sure Swati-di misses nothing. The sheer outrageous content of the play is spellbinding. To witness the housewife's turmoils is hurtful. And in the end to sense how she gains control over her own life in a more constructing way than Hedda Gabler, who committed suicide in order to escape the numbness of her married life, is a relief.

In a rehearsal like this, where the solo performer is also the director of the play and it has been played several times before, there is no instruction going on. The type of learning on the behalf of the juniors present is on a more implicit and indirect level. They have now become partakers. *Shanu* is an adaptation of a British play, but Nandikar did not choose it because it told something interesting about English society. British Shirley becomes Shanu when she enters the stage in Kolkata. The topics of liberation are the same, and *Shanu* is thought to communicate something about the human condition as such in Nandikar's performance (as I guess it is felt in "the West"). The topic is that of a woman allowing her own feelings again to play a part in her everyday life, but within Nandikar it is not

portrayed as a feminist play. They stress it as a humanistic performance. And with humanistic they refer to “individual” longings versus the expectations of the “society”. This is a topic that has permeated much anthropological works on India. Dumont discussed the Indian self as one defined relationally, *Homo hierarchicus* – man as a collective being, within a societal hierarchy based on *varna* and as an opposition to the egalitarian self of the modern Western man, *Homo aequalis* – man as an individual (Dumont 1998 [1966]: especially 231-8). A play like *Shanu* can thus appear to be an example of a process of modernisation where an European conception of the self as atomic, as something self-sufficient and in opposition to the society at large – a modernisation brought into Indian societies through an European inspired academic and artistic tradition. But it is more complicated than so.

During a workshop at a girls’ college individual expressiveness was stressed as a part of a game where the students were supposed to move with the music, when the music stopped the students should stop. Then they described their own or others postures. While the girls were making their figures, Sir told them to go within themselves to find an individual expression of the situation they should portray. And, he added in English, “I do not mean an individuality like his (*he nodded towards me*)”.

The Western constitution of an Indian self as one defined by its relations is well known in India and more often than not opposed. While his remark was both aimed at me and to the girls, it implied that there exists a pre-understanding of what he was talking about. My point is again to show that the repertoire the activists draw from in their performative practise is very varied and to explore the individuals place within society is not done within some pure textbook definition of an Indian self, but with references also to European notions in order to counterpoise different ways of re-acting.

## **Cooldown**

It is 9:30 p.m. and the rehearsal is over – some change clothes, a few seniors walks into the office to wind up the administrative tasks of today and make the final plans

for tomorrow, others goes outside for a chat, a cigarette, a last glass of *caa* – and things return to normal. They leave the world of rehearsals and re-enter the world of Shyambazaar; a world with telephones, visitors, co-citizens on their way home or on a stroll in the neighbourhood on their way to their favourite *adda*-place, barking dogs, funeral processions, bandits and lovers.

The cooldown after a performance proper is described as an in-between phase, a bridge between “the focused activity of the performance to the more open and diffuse experiences of the everyday life” (Schechner 2002: 211). This also goes for rehearsals, which, despite the lack of non-Nandikar partakers, is the activity leaving most traces in the participants bodies concerning their ways to engage with the world and to reflect upon and present themselves.

## **The Pavement**

The pavement outside 47/1 Shyambazaar Street is an extension of the rooms inside and a place where one can take a break, drink *caa* and chat. It is a place where rented carpenters make parts of the set. It is a senior where the way of socialising is more easy-going than inside, and where the juniors hang around before and after a rehearsal. It is the place where the working day usually ends with the juniors waving goodbye to Sir and Swati-di as they travel home in the rented car. And it is the place where I did most of my informal talks on the different aspects of Nandikar’s work. From the pavement “the fleeting sense of discovery and illumination” of rehearsals is at the same time both distant and close, at least it is distant enough for the participants, me included, in order to relate to the demanding practises in such a way that it can be a subject for discussion.

Through the engagement in what here is broadly termed rehearsals the younger participants, the apprentices, are consciously induced into practises designed to leave traces in their bodies. They have to get familiar with a wide variety of plays, aesthetically traditions and performative practises, in terms of geographical and historical origin, that all can be seen as flows in theatrescapes. The experiences gained through these practises make the juniors, according to their own statements, identify themselves as members of a, if not

global then at least transnational, community and gives them new images to act according to. Their everyday activities are accomplished with explicit references to a wide variety of practises and philosophies that are located – by the informants – to different places, times and traditions. Through different plays they relate to different communities, within and outside Kolkata and Bengal, and are much aware of differences in acting, in practises, in representations and in embodied practises. Through different performative practises employed to communicate these differences of being and different manifestations of culture that they acquire a repertoire of acting that makes them relate to wide spatial and historical varieties of practises and sites that discloses to them the feeling of participating in a global community of theatre activists.

Through these rehearsals the juniors acquire new images or conceptual maps from divergent (spatial and historical speaking) performative practises due to the Nandikar seniors' engagement with a theatre that they place within a World of Theatre. These images provide the juniors with the possibility to imagine new practises and sites of reacting that inspires “a mode of relating to contemporary reality [...] that simultaneously problematises man's relations to the present, man's historical mode of being and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject” (Gaonkar 2001: 13). This mode of relating to contemporary reality is used to define modernity, while acquiring new imaginations the way the Nandikar juniors do is an important aspect of globalisation. These new ways of engagements the juniors acquire will be further elaborated when the performances reaches the stages in chapter 6, but before we enter the theatre halls a broader contextualisation of Nandikar is needed.

The rehearsal practises within the valourised site of the rehearsal room are not conducted in a historyless vacuum or hyper-space. The hybridic character of the rehearsals that teaches the juniors about the hybrid character of cultural manifestations is more like reverberations of the contexts it is placed within. And the most evident context is the city where Nandikar mainly operates. Hybridity is a central aspect of Kolkata and the presence of others through history that accelerate hybridity should also been seen as important



forces constituting the metropolis as modern, at a time when most other cities were not. Theatre provides a stage as a special site to analyse, commenting and criticise the actors' own time and society, but there had also existed sites of critique before the advent of an engaged theatre – namely the *baajaars*. And these are the major topics in the following chapter.

## 6 City Visibility



Shyambazaar five-point crossing

If we ask [...] where the first historical occurrence was of what we today we call the ‘modern multicultural’ city, the answer is certainly not in the European or North American ‘core’ cities of London, Los Angeles or New York, but probably in ‘peripheral’ ones of Rio, Calcutta or Mombasa (King 1995: 114).

In order to understand the practises of Nandikar it is necessary to contextualise them in space and time. This chapter begins with following the Nandikar participants out of their office-cum-rehearsal site, through Kolkata and ends at the cultural hub of Nandan. I will display the cityscapes as urban fields characterised by globality, as modern, multicultural and hybrid sites. Like Nandikar’s theatre shows intense hybridisation, the urban site of Kolkata forms a map in every sense of the word of the same hybrid globalisation. All sites tend to be naturalised to the people who live there. By whom is often the question, especially in post-colonial settings, but again this often fails to accept the contributions and the creativity of groups outside the power struggles of politics and economy. Kolkata cityscapes are constituted by, and constitute in its own right, images or conceptual maps of

hybridity, a hybridity that may infuse aversion into those who have been socialised into a society that stress borders, homogeneity and purity. The *baajaars* are used as an example of a hybridity that is important in disclosing Kolkata and the theatre of Nandikar.

## Going to the Theatre

I asked one of my informants about how he walked in the streets and how he related to Kolkata. He said he brings his own private space with him. He just focused on how to reach his goal, and only occasionally does he sense how congested it is, and that is when someone or something blocks his way and makes it difficult to pass, and that is, he added, rather often.

Its 11:30 am and we are about to leave Sir's house. We, this time, are Sir himself, Swtai-di, Susanta, Jahar and myself. We wait for Robindra, the driver, and spot him from the veranda as he parks his second hand, white Ambassador at the side of the pavement in front of a statue of a politician raised by the politician himself. I carry the big, flat box with the synthesiser and my own bag. Jahar takes care of Sir and Swati-dis bags. Susanta is already outside making sure the driver has opened the luggage room. When the luggage is where it should be, we enter the car. In the backseat Swati-di has taken her place on the side, Jahar in the middle and Susanta on the other side. In the front I have been given the space between Sir and the driver. This leaves me with little space for my shoulders, and to sit comfortably I put my left arm on the top of the seat around Sir's shoulders, which also gives me the opportunity to grab the window frame so I do not have to rattle too much around and disturb Sir and the others.

In Kolkata 6,5% of the city's area is occupied by roads (Chaudhuri 1990: 148). Compared to other Indian metropolitan cities the percentage is very low: Mumbai has 16%, New Delhi has 23% (ibid), while a non-metropolis like Oslo has 15,8% (Statistisk Sentralbyrå 2002). It might sound nice with a city where only a small portion of the area is devoted to roads, but this does not mean that the traffic is less perceptible; out of sight, soundless or without taste and odour. The opposite is in fact the reality; the more cars, trucks, trams,

buses, rickshaws, motorbikes and taxis one place in a limited area, the more monstrous it looks, the higher it roars, the obtrusive it tastes and the more violently it tickles the nose. The traffic has made Kolkata infamous, both from the citizens, the visitors and the readers' point of view. The streets of Kolkata are extremely congested, and in many ways contested. A result of this is the times spent on transport from one place to another makes up a significant part of the day. To estimate the time one will spend on a travel from one part of the city to another according to the day of the year and week, and the time of the day takes years of experience. Even with all this experience of living in the city there might be a political rally, which one was unaware of or a major accident blocking the road. Knowing exactly when and where there will be a gridlock is impossible. The only thing one can take for granted is that one will witness at least one minor collision, involving your car or bus, or someone in the vicinity. Lately the proto-American activity labelled *road rage* has also been playing a part in this sensible image.

To the theatre activists of Nandikar Kolkata is a place of inspiration, rehearsals and performances. It is the streets, *baajaars* and theatre halls – the places where you meet everyone and everything. Kolkata gets in the way if one wants it or not. It is a city where the population in 2001 reached about 4.5 millions within the city proper (Census of India 2001a), while Kolkata Urban Agglomerate has the second largest population in India with slightly above 13 million people (Census of India 2001b). A journey through the city is like a commemorative ceremony, contributing to your awareness of difference and hybridity. The *baajaars* of Kolkata were important sites for comments and critique, with the introduction of theatre new sites for engagement became evident.

## **Kolkata Images**

A large component of the identity of that place called home derived precisely from the fact that it had always on one way or another been open; constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it (Massey 1992: 14).

A couple of years before I conducted my fieldwork, a play was staged on a graveyard in North Kolkata. Nandikar performed their dramatised version of Michael Madhusudan Datta's (1824-1873) poem *Meghnad Bodh Kabya* as a tribute on his birthday. The poem is,

as mentioned before, a re-written version of Ramayana<sup>16</sup>, one of the most important Hindu epics. Datta turned the epic up side down, emphasising how the god Rama is treacherous when he liberates his wife from the imprisonment of the demon. Rama lied and betrayed to reach his goal and acted like the colonisers in Datta's Bengal (the play is described and interpreted in length in chapter 7). The members of Nandikar made Datta's poem into a one-man performance, usually staged on a European proscenium stage, in a physical language of acting inspired by Aristotle and Bharata-muni, as well as Brecht and Mitra. The birthday-performance took place by Michael's grave and dwelled in a cityscape of Kolkata that commemorates simultaneously both colonial past and indigenous greatness.

There are several graveyards in Kolkata, and the narratives they tell outnumber the tombstones and the epitaphs they contain. They are like an overview of colonial enterprises; of war and trade; of pre-mature death in harsh surroundings, of generals and soldiers; of priests and bishops with tasks ranging from mission to doing the Easter mass. Here are the mysteries of commoners and elite, of the clerk and Job Charnock. And sometimes you will find the grave of a christianised Bengali like Michael Madhusudan Datta, who through his work revolutionised Bengali literature and participated in forming the educated Bengali majority's identity (Sen 1979).

The connotations of performing this play in a churchyard may seem stronger to an observer from outside than to a Kolkata citizen. Kolkata is a city of multitude – symbolical speaking, historical talking, ethnical discussing, architectural shouting, trouser-brands gossiping. The residents are both aware of this, and used to it; they reflect upon it and do not give a damn about it. Kolkata is a "City of Splendid Palaces and Dingy Streets" (Mukherjee 1987), "the city of dreadful night" (Kipling 1900), "The City of Joy" (Lapierre 1986), "a city of furious creative energy" (Sinha 1972: 7), "one of the world's urban infernos" (Hannerz 1992: 182) "a dying city" (Rajiv Gandhi in Chakrovorty 2000: 56) and "the gateway to the Asian tigers (proclaimed by recent rulers)" (ibid.). And the

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<sup>16</sup> The plot of the Ramayana is that Rama's wife Sita is kidnapped by the demon Ravana, and therefore Rama vanquishes Ravana and recovers Sita

Bengali upper class had Greek columns in front of their *haveli* (courtyard house). This apparently random use of places, traditions, columns and symbols are not only a contemporary image of the metropolis Kolkata, but also meditations on a plural past. Meditations often experienced also in the theatre halls.

Kolkata is the set, the context and the place the Nandikar participants act within and upon. And, as such, it must be elaborated, since it is here the main story takes place. As David Harvey points out,

the built environment constitutes one element in a complex of urban experiences that has long been a vital crucible for the forging of new cultural sensibilities. How a city looks and how its spaces are organised forms a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and social practises can be thought about, evaluated, and achieved (1990: 66-7).

While Harvey seems to agree that cities can be sensed in a way that give people new images, making new practises possible, he never shows how it actually is experienced by individuals or smaller groups. His analysis is like the pictures he uses to illustrate his work, almost totally devoid of people.

This part is written in an effort to describe the overall, as well as the more specific, physical and representational structures of Kolkata. I do this in order to communicate an understanding, or images, of where my informants live their lives as members of Nandikar. Where they dwell, and how this dwelling gives them possible imaginations they can use to think, evaluate and act in accordance to. After a short history of the city I turn towards a discussion on its *baajaars*. As the origin of Kolkata they display how social interaction between a wide variety of communities always have been an organising force and constituted an representational image of Kolkata as an intersect of flows from many places outside the borders of Bengal, in the same manner as Group Theatre and Nandikar did later.

## Building Baajaars – A Spatial History

Job Charnock founded Kolkata on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> August 1690 as a trading post to the British East India Company (colloquially referred to as the Company) in an era when the Mughals ruled Northern India. The trading post grew and soon became the Company's the major foothold on the subcontinent, and when Kolkata became the capital under the British crown in 1858, it also became the sixth capital of Bengal through history. Today the metropolis is the capital of the state of West-Bengal, India.

Job Charnock's duty was to establish a trading post in the land of Shaista Khan, the Nawab of Bengal (Nair 1990; Sinha 1990; Bose and Jalal 1998). The place he found was on the east bank of the river Ganga<sup>17</sup> among the three villages Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata. It was a narrow belt of relative high natural embankment surrounded by marshes, tidal creeks, mangrove creeks and wetlands (Gupta 2000), surroundings, which you will find even today. The British traders started to build Kolkata as a trading post, as a place from where to extract enormous wealth out of the country. They did not plan to build the second city in the British Empire or one of largest urban agglomerations in the world. They did in fact plan very little, and that was the beginning of Kolkata. The urban planning came later as a result of pressure on available land, increase of importance to the Company and later the Crown, higher prestige, and new ethic and moral principles according to a dichotomy between "us", the Britons, and "them", the Indians.

Soon after the foundation, in 1696, the British traders built the palisaded Fort William (Moorhouse 1983 [1971]; Nair 1990). In 1756 the fort was destroyed by the Nawab and the English traders started a war against him. The war ended in the Battle at Palashi the following year, where the Nawab was defeated, and this mark the beginning of the supremacy of the East India Company in the state of Bengal. A new Fort William was build, this time further to the south. After the Company's victory, they took the

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<sup>17</sup> In maps her name is Hugli, while in earlier and in most present-day western maps and books it is spelt Hooghly. Colloquially it is referred to as Ganga, which is the same name that the Englishmen changed into Ganges.

consequences of the attack and surrounded the new fort with a huge empty field, which made it easier to defend the fort. The field is named Maidan and until today it has avoided approbation in the name of apartment house and shopping centre building. Maidan is a recreational area, a pasture area, football ground and cricket field; it houses the annual Book Mela, other *melas* (festivals) and political rallies. It provides for the citizens a place where the sound of cars feels distant and the Sunday picnic can be labelled child-friendly, free from cars and with a wide range of leisure possibilities. Maidan is at the same time extremely urban, as a picnic-spot and city hideout, and quite rural, with herders and their pasturing goats. Maidan is also one of the few places in Kolkata that has a horizon.

Encircling Maidan is what used to be the colonial settlers area, the White Town of British Kolkata. To the north is what used to be and still is the administrative centre. White Town is today centred round the water tank in BBD Bag<sup>18</sup>, Tank Square, or Dalhousie Square as the British called the place. On the Western side runs Chowringee Road, the old shopping and colonial residential street with its new, but seldom used, official name Jawaharlal Nehru Street. The buildings dominating White Town are colonial, and therefore the architecture still prevailing display neo-classical columns and ornaments. The south-western corner of Maidan is bordered with Birla Planetarium, the St. Peter's Cathedral and the Nandan area – the cultural hub of Kolkata. On the southern end of Maidan is the enormous, white marble Victoria Memorial, built in honour of the British Queen Victoria (1819-1901). Further to the south a fairly new part of the city has grown, but within this area is still the old pilgrimage temple of Kali, Kalighat. To the east is a major road and after that Ganga. Across Ganga is Howrah, an old trade and jute production city which predates the founding of Kolkata. Moving away from the fields of Maidan and the areas encircling her is what used to be the native part of colonial Kolkata north of the administrative centre. In accordance to the Britons racial ideology it was labelled Black Town, and within it many of the *baajaars* were located. Going north from BBD Bagh one of the first *baajaars* is Barabazaar and farthest off is Shyambazaar. In a morphological

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<sup>18</sup> *BBD* denotes the three men, Binay/Bipin, Badal and Dinesh, who tried to assassinate Governor-General Lord Dalhousie; *Bag* (*baag*) denotes garden.



description like this, it is easy to stress the simple borders of colonial and non-colonial neighbourhoods, but this is not the city that Nandikar engages with. As the next section will display, it is far more complex than that.

## Going Urban

In 1981 India's urban population reached 159 million people and surpassed that of USA (Ramachandran 1989: 1). In 2001 it was 12 000 settlements with a population of 5 000 or more, and the urban population was estimated to be 285 millions of a total population of 1.027 billions. Still only 25 percent of India's population live in urban areas, but the sheer amount of people implies that India also exists in its cities and towns. A major change the recent decades strengthening this view is that the image of the city today exists among almost every inhabitant of this country. Take for instance the folk culture of present-day India epitomised in its extremely popular and widespread movies. Most of these movies use the city as an important backdrop. And very often the city is the place where dreams come through, becomes true or get broken. The city is a catalyst, a place that makes "thing" happen. And these images are distributed by cinema and television to the most un-urban areas and as a result the city becomes a part of almost everyone's (cultural, symbolical) repertoire. The strong images of the city is something that also exist among the city dwellers, and in all the Nandikar plays I have seen, cities play an important part. It was in the royal city of Lanka that Rama killed the demon, it was from the city milieu that Shanu of the urban upper middleclass left, and *Naagar Keertan*<sup>19</sup> tells the story of how the son of an traditional Brahmin household leaves his parents in a restless search for an identity and his own place within the possibilities that the city gives.

A common approach<sup>20</sup> to Indian cities emphasise the overall level of the city and the individual dwelling unit as cultural specific (Desai 1995, Rapoport 1969, Prasad 1997). The city is a built environment (Lawrence and Low 1990: 454 in Low 1999b), it is "produced by human action" (Castells 1983: 311), and since it is a result of "social

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<sup>19</sup> In this context *naagar* means city, while *keertan* is a traditional devotional song – Nandikar's own translation is *The Ballad of the City*.

<sup>20</sup> For a more elaborated discussion, see Heierstad (2000).

production” (Low 1999b) the societies who built them can be read out and interpreted on the basis of spatial form. This approach stresses the urban morphology, the build form, as created or influenced by culture – or by economical, social, political, environmental and technological factors (Marcuse and Kempen 2000). Following such an ideal, much theorising about Indian cities resulted in a typology categorising Indian cities into either colonial or indigenous ideal types. Indigenous Indian cities are analysed with references to mainly *jati*, “caste” based on occupation and kinship (Desai 1995). There are differences in spatial organisation, but the hierarchical relations between the centre and the surroundings are the same and this reflects *jati* as key values in spatial organisation. The social settlement patterns based on *jati* are seen as the organising force creating the spatial organisation, the cityscape. The colonial cities are understood with reference to primarily the colonists’ racial ideology since colonial cities often are divided into a white, European town and a black, Indian town.

A central objective of this approach is to classify and categorise historical, present and processual features. The end product of such an exercise is often a reified representation of ideal patterns of social and spatial organisation. Every city tends to resist such an approach since it overlooks the intermingling of organisational practises existing in the city. This, however, does not imply that I believe a materialist approach to cities as socially produced is wrong, but, following Low, the *social construction* aspect must also be present (1999b). The term *social construction* denotes

the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control. Thus, the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space – through people’s social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning (ibid: 112).

When the urban space is changed into scenes and actions that convey meaning, it also carries the potential to catalyse change. But before I turn to this, the social production of Kolkata is presented.

## **Social Production of a Colonial City**

According to Desai, the spatial (physical) development of an Indian colonial city established by the British has three phases, reflecting different ways and ideas of social organising (1995). Kolkata started, like most British colonial cities in India, as a settlement to a small group of traders. The settlement started to become urban in terms of size and complexity with the building of palisades (Fort William) in 1696. The fortification marks the beginning of the first phase of urban Kolkata. The British obtained the Nawab's permission to erect the fort after a feudal lord of southern Bengal had threatened the new settlement. This suited the settlers well, since one of their goals in Bengal was to build a fortified centre completing a triangle of British power together with Mumbai and Madras (Sinha 1990). All the main commercial and residential buildings were contained within the Fort. The houses outside the rampart were built in an ad hoc and random way. According to Desai the interaction between the Indians and the English was common and informal (1995). Choudhury argues that a strengthening of the palisades and the introduction of guarded gates around 1742 was the beginning of a "white ghetto" (1990: 157) and a result of the beginning racial ideology. When a large part of the palisaded English settlement was demolished by Siraj-ud-Daula and the new Fort William was built, this "reinforced the southward thrust of the more organised part of the city" (Choudhury 1990: 159).

When the numbers of Europeans increased as a result of the favourable trade and the need for protection they felt the urge to control the growth of the city. This marks the shift to the second phase of urban development, "characterised by the binary system of spacious European residential areas and a crowded multifunctional indigenous city" (Desai 1995: 5). This racial zoning expresses how the Europeans distanced themselves from the natives and the ideas of uncleanness they associated with them (ibid.). In addition the Europeans divided their White Town into separate commercial and residential areas. They moved out of the city and made suburbs for their garden houses, suburbs that today are within the city proper.

A third phase of the colonial city started at during the nineteenth century with more attention paid to the creation of a more coherent and planned settlement. While not stated, this could easily be understood as a consequence of enlightenment with its ideas concerning a scientific or value free approach to problems (Gaonkar 2001), a time when “modernity seized control of India and subjected it to a ‘second colonisation’” (Prakash 1996: 59). As an instrument of the British, modernity’s power, authorised by science, is said to pave the ground for “a brave new world [that] was first tried out in the colonies” (ibid.), and scientific reason became the organising metaphor. This also made an impact on built form, with new drainage systems and purer water more easily accessible, straighter streets and more uniform buildings.

This short description of the spatial organisation raises questions concerning what produced this spatial organisation. From phase two the answer is that key values as order, separation and difference is understood as the organising force creating this “culturally distinct environment for the ... colonists” (Desai 1994: 4). The spatial organisation of Kolkata is thus understood as a result of key values – like racial division and the belief in scientific approaches – manifested in British culture and social organisation (Prakash 1996). However, this misses to pinpoint other equally important aspects, like the impact made by the Indian majority.

### **Social Production of a Kolkata Cityscape**

Another image of Kolkata, as something more than a colonial product, may also be presented. Departing from indigenous Indian cities, the Indian productions of built form in Kolkata may be presented. Indigenous Indian cities, cities not founded or heavily influenced by colonisers, consists of two sub-types, where the first is marked by its regularity while the latter has a spatial organisation recognised by an “informal, irregular grid pattern of winding streets, broadening occasionally into squares and markets” (Desai 1995: 11). A brief walk through the indigenous Black Town of North Kolkata puts this area into the latter group. Desai writes that all the indigenous cities are multifunctional with no distinction between residential and business areas. Three types of roads define the

cities. First there are the big roads of transport; from these roads run the smaller road where the markets can be found. Between these minor roads, which traditionally had gates at each end and buildings on the sides housing a rather singular group, often from one *jati*, are found. The spatial organisation is thus a result of the *jati*-system and opposition against interaction between the different *jatis*. A closer look into the Black Town of Kolkata will reveal spatial forms constituting a break from the indigenous ways of organisation described by Desai. The break is marked by the importance of the marketplaces, or *baajaars*<sup>21</sup>.

As “perhaps the most critical nexus in the complex network of political, economic, and religious life, the key link in the intricate “passage of authority” that composed early colonial Bengal” (Urban 2001: 1086) the importance of the *baajaars* is unquestionable. According to some the area was “sprinkled with ganj-es and bazaars” before 1690 (Bandyopadhyay 1990: 117). These were places “where people gathered regularly and *en masse* for trade and entertainment” (Urban 2001: 1889). Black Town was, and North Kolkata is, dotted with *baajaars*, functioning as local centres giving the different parts of the area their names. A *baajaar* has a centre where the official traders are situated often in a planned building and an outer sector with pavement stalls and displays more like the village *haat* (market). People from different communities controlled various *baajaars* or parts of *baajaars*. The marketplaces themselves were organised in a hierarchical network running out from urban centres. In Kolkata the centre was *Barabaajaar* (*bara* is derived from a name given to god Shiva; Great Bazaar) where most of the “the *kothis* (small factory; firm) and bazaars were located” (Bhattacharya 1990, my translation). Kolkata is thus not an indigenous city in Desai’s definition, not even in the part where the indigenous or non-British people lived and worked. But what kind of story do we get if the production of indigenous areas in Kolkata is made the point of departure?

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<sup>21</sup> There are different forms of markets in Bengal, where *baajaars* refers to the permanent markets for general merchandise. Other forms of markets are the *haat* - a local (village) periodic market, the *ganj* - a wholesale market for bulk goods, and the *mela* - refereeing to fairs. (Urban 2001: 1087)

As mentioned above, traditional Indian cities are defined by key values concerning *jati* (Desai: 1995). In the early years of Kolkata *jati* did matter (Hannerz 1992: 183), but in a secondary way. Kolkata was different because a large number of immigrants and “others” always constituted the majority to a given community. This makes communities other than those defined by *jati* a primary unit in the social life. Colesworth Grant in his *Anglo-Indian Sketches* mentions “a diversified group of Persians, Arabs, Jews, Marwarees, Armenians, Madrasees, Sikhs, Turks, Parsees, Chinese, Burmes, (and) Bengalees” (Bhattacharya 1990: 204) in a description of Kolkata’s *Barabaajaar*. In Desai’s “traditional cities”, markets were located on the streets encircling the *jati*-based neighbourhoods. In Kolkata different communities met to trade and this made the *baajaars* the focal point of the spatial organisation. Different communities, most of them organised internally on the basis of *jati*, resulted in a distinct cityscape based on the differences between them and not the similarities concerning *jati*-values. The overall social organisation replaced cultural values like *jati* and purity as organising forces with that of competing communities engaged in trade.

The morphology of Kolkata is complex and not just a result of the colonisers. The way Desai describes the development has never *taken place*. The plurality of communities all contributed to the city’s spatial organisation concerning the centrality of *baajaars*. The categories of Desai stress important and historical differences, but take a singular society as the point of departure. Black Town is also a part of Kolkata and non-Britons living here also have social practises producing the spatial forms, but Desai seems to forget this. Or perhaps he feels the spatial forms developed in Black Town are not really Indian, since the colonisers influenced the area? The lack of interest in the indigenous areas supports such an interpretation. Desai’s description can also be understood as an acceptance of a discourse left by the former colonialists. As mentioned above, a city forms the material basis and images upon which a range of possible sensations can be thought of and imagined.

## **Social Construction, Experience and Change**

Kolkata is more than the debris, or a mere product of human interaction and social organisation. It is a carrier of images, meaning, of symbols and since it is a result of several ways of organising it creates new ways of interaction and human action. There are, and has always been, a relation between the citizens and the cityscape, where the society produce built forms and attach them with meaning, and the forms reproduce and sometimes change the society [Lawrence and Low 1990: 455]. The spatial organisation is not a dead image of the cultural processes; it is more like a mirror. Desai describes the historical indigenous spatial organisation as a “subtle modulations from street as circulatory route to street as urban place ... [that] provide a rich variety of experiences for the city dweller” (1995: 15). This richness is mainly a result of the multifunctional city. For Desai the environment can be a facilitator of social interaction (ibid: 25), but he do not mention how. Several have shown how the environment may function in socialising or structuring the inhabitants (Low 1990a provides an overview, see also Bourdieu 1977, Harvey 2000, Low 1999b, Lund 2001). This stresses dialectic processes where man “in making the city [...] has remade himself” (Park 1967 cited in Harvey 2000:159). The *baajaars*, understood as the source or origin of Kolkata, provide a good example of how cityscapes make new forms of social interaction possible, social interactions that reverberate in Nandikar’s performative practises.

The *baajaars* in the Black Town of Kolkata are meeting points of entertainment, economic forces, political power and religious patronage (Urban 2001: 1087). As places of both commerce, politic and rumour, the city *baajaars* are a continuation of the village *haat*. All the *baajaars*, major and minor, resulted in an intermingling of commercial, residential and religious buildings. The different markets did not belong exclusively to the rich, also the poor and subalterns made the markets their *stage* as a “special site of critique, a realm where also the lower classes could speak out and criticise the dominant order or the lives of the wealthy upper classes” (Urban 2001: 1089). At the same time the markets were under the control and regulation of the colonists. Anyway, there seems to be little doubt that the *baajaars* were a “realm of social interaction that transcends ordinary social barriers” (ibid.)

bringing people independent of gender<sup>22</sup>, *jatis* and classes together without controlling their interaction. The Kolkata *baajaars* were a result of trade in a community-based society. The strange thing is that values of purity in the communities creating the *baajaars* of Kolkata should resist such an intermingling of different gender and class. An intermingling that made the *baajaars* important as sites where resistance could be staged since it contained such a large and diverse group of possible partakers. Since values in the different communities cannot be described as the creator of resistance, could the resistance then be a result of the *baajaars*?

*Baajaars* are constructed in such a way that they are open to everyone at the same time as they are closed enough to make control from the outside difficult. As opposed to the airy streets and parks of White Town where no one could hide, the *baajaars* provided shelter. The *baajaars* provided the spatial organisation making social interaction possible between different kinds of people who traditionally or ideally would not meet. The social control known from *jati* or racial based, and thus divided, cities was not possible to the same degree. The communities of Kolkata were not able to exercise the control seen in *jati*-based villages or cities. In addition it was in everyone's interest that the shops were open and accessible to everyone, the *baajaars* became in this respect almost value-free in an effort to promote commerce. The place thus facilitated social interaction, which resulted in milieus where social critique and resistance against existing values became possible. In Nandikar's attempt to create a theatre that attracts larger groups of partakers, they want to (re-)create a similar milieu of social critique.

Desai's indigenous cities are recognised by being multifunctional, but they contain closed neighbourhoods based on *jatis* reproducing the existing social order. The *baajaars* of Kolkata created new ways of interaction among groups that traditionally, or ideally, were not allowed to interact. This is one of many different ways where the social constructions

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<sup>22</sup> The institution of *purdha*, segregating women from the public scene, was enforced on only a small minority of the women, and then primarily the *bhadramahila* of higher class and *varna* – the wives and daughters of the *bhadralok* (Banerjee 1989b; Bagchi 1990).



of spatial form make a difference in a society's practises. The *baajaars* as areas of resistance are not accidental, but partly a result of relations between citizens and cityscapes.

The city of *baajaars* is the city the Nandikar participants drive through on their way to work, to the different theatre halls. The city of the social constructed *baajaars*, where "everyone" is given a site to speak and perform, is the image many of them learn from their seniors as they drive through the city and during rehearsals, and later perform to others.

The *baajaars* are still sites for performances, they are still sites of resistance, but some, like Nandikar, have found another stage – that of the theatre halls.

## Theatres

Like the *baajaars*, the theatres are meeting places. They are sites where critic and comments, of describing *sine qua non*, the conditions of living, and cultural, communal characteristics are staged.

There are several histories of the Kolkata theatre scene. As mentioned in chapter 2, the indigenous theatre of Kolkata started with influence from several sources like the English theatre, the Sanskrit theatre and the *jatra*. Sanskrit theatre had been dead for a long time as a performative practise, but was probably performed on a wide variety of stages from two-floored ones to column hallways in connection to temples. The *jatra* was usually performed on temporary stages. I have found no references to specialised buildings for theatre in Kolkata before the first English theatre halls emerged, so it is likely that the *baajaars* and other markets provided the sites for performances that pre-dated the British theatres.

With the introduction of English theatre, the proscenium<sup>23</sup> archstages made its first appearance in India. While the first building to house theatre in Kolkata was the already mentioned The Playhouse from 1753, the first proscenium stage in Kolkata was Calcutta Theatre, built in 1775 during the Governor Generalship of Warren Hasting (Raha 1993: 12). With the Calcutta Theatre started an expanding theatrical activity giving the English community the possibility to visit theatres like Wheler Place Theatre, Dum Dum Theatre, Baitaconah Theatre and, the most famous of them all at that time, Chowringhee Theatre, which opened in 1813 (ibid.) with 'Prince' Dwarakanath Thakur as one of the founders (Raha 1990). The first playhouse to stage Bengali actors performing a play in the European theatre tradition was build in Dom Tollah (now Ezra Street) around 1795 on the initiative of a Russian named Herasim Lebedeff (Mukherjee 1982: 8-11). After only two performances the playhouse was burned down and Lebedeff sent to prison harassed by creditors. After being released short time later, he left India. The first theatre founded by a Bengali for a Bengali audience and housed in the Bengali quarter of Kolkata was named Hindu Theatre. It was modelled on English theatres and the plays should have been presented in English, but it was a private theatre only for invited guests (Mukherjee 1982:13-4). Thereafter followed the Shyambazaar Theatre in the house of Nabin Chandra Basu where the Shyambazaar tram terminus now is and several other private stages that more often than not were temporary structures (Raha 1990: 187). The private theatres were built within the homes of the rich patrons of the art in the Bengali quarters of Black Town. The first public theatre, the National Theatre was, ironically enough, housed in a private residence. In 1855 the first regular proscenium theatre staging Bengali productions was built.

Many theatres have existed in Kolkata since 1775. Today there are more than 24 major theatres in the city and Nandikar has performed in most of them. Among all the theatre

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<sup>23</sup> Proscenium: **a.** In the ancient theatre, the space between the 'scene' or background and the orchestra, on which the action took place; the stage. **b.** In the modern theatre, the space between the curtain or drop-scene and the orchestra; often including the curtain itself and the arch or framework which holds it (Oxford English Dictionary Online).

halls of Kolkata is the one at the Academy of Fine Art. This stage is located in what is referred to as “the cultural hub of Kolkata”, Nandan.

The Nandan area houses a grand, new cinema hall, an even bigger theatre named Rabindra Sadan and several other “cultural” institutions. The whole area is also a hangout place for couples, youth and people generally interested in what’s up. The area is a rallying point for youth and adults alike; with places for gossiping and *caa* drinking, out of sight corners for flirting and a scene worthwhile watching. Almost every evening there is some sort of a cultural function going on outside. It varies between Little Magazines Melas, poem recitations and theatre songs to political demonstrations and minor theatre festivals. Nandan is a place where it is possible to spend time watching the performance of an Assamese play, before you leave to see a film by Jean-Luc Godard. When the film is over, you can join your friends outside and listen to the recitation of some French poems translated to Bengali and accompanied to a few musicians playing harmonium, guitar and *dhaak* (drum), while an artist is preparing an art installation that includes a huge amount of water bottles. Next to, but outside the walls encircling Nandan, is the Academy of Fine Art.

### **The Academy of Fine Art**

The Academy building houses in addition to the theatre hall, several exhibition rooms with art galleries featuring exhibitions by contemporary artists, a small Rabindra Gallery exhibiting Tagore memorabilia and art classes. It was set up at the initiative of Lady Ranu Mukherjee in 1933 and it is promoted as a favourite rendezvous of Kolkata's cultural intelligentsia.

The theatre has a proscenium stage and it seats 735 persons. The rates for renting the theatre are Rs 3 500 for Group Theatres, while others must expect to pay between Rs 4 500 and 6 000. Its gallery is only used when a lot of people are expected; the tickets to the gallery are the cheapest. The stage is about 20 meters wide and 18 meter deep. It has a rotating floor, which is out of function. The backstage area is small, limiting the

possibilities of set changes during a performance. There are two entrances for the partakers, one leading to the first floor gallery, the other to the stalls. There are also two entrances for the theatre workers. One leading to the main green room, while the other is at the backside of the stage and is used as a working entrance. Opposite the main green room, at the other side of the stage, there are two more dressing rooms used by the more senior actors.

On the first visit to the Academy it is easy to get the feeling that the place is divided into two distinctive parts: The front with its garden, the main entrance and small paved roads which leads to the sides (the one to the left takes you to the entrance of the theatre), and the dusty, unpaved back. It seems to be constituted by an opposition between public and private, but there is no need to spend much time here to see that it is not like that at all.

On the backside of the theatre there are some shacks where a few troupes, including Nandikar, have storage rooms. Here is also a stall selling *caa*, coffee and finger food, props and stage sets are spread around.

When I arrive at the Academy it is usually no one that I know in front of it. Still, a lot of students, art-lovers and flâneurs enjoy sitting in the Academy's precinct; chatting, discussing, drinking *caa* and waiting for something to happen. I walk past them and turn down the pathway to the left. Some voices leap round the corner from the back of the theatre and I walk in that direction. It is the second day of the National Theatre Festival and the set to Nandikar's own performance is not finished. Still there is need of paint and a few props have to be reinforced. The work is done under the supervision of Susanta and Jahar, and they do some of it themselves with the help of other juniors and trainees. The entire set is constructed outside. First, on the pavement in front of Nandikar's office, then outside the back entrance of the Academy, next to the kiosk.

Susanta sits on a part of someone's set, smokes, and directs Gautam with a harsh voice. Gautam shakes his head slowly, smiles, and does the opposite of what the

protagonist Susanta demands. Seeing me they end the pretended discussion and Susanta offers me his place to sit. 30 seconds later and we all three drink *caa*. Halfway through a cigarette we hear someone starts singing, loud, very loud. Without turning we already know it is Anil, nicely dressed, just finished with today's job. He buys a glass of *caa*, lights a cigarette and joins us. Susanta and Gautam discuss a scene in *Football* where there is turmoil between a few hooligans and some men waiting for the bus. They disagree with the way one of the established acts as an old man. Anil breaks in and takes side with Gautam. Susanta brushes him to the side and says that he has nothing to say since he spends so little time on the rehearsal. Gautam agrees with Susanta and Anil turns towards me to discuss the way the manual labourers that work for Nandikar for a monthly fee are treated. "They used to be the *dadas* (big brothers) (to the established), but now they are nothing. The younger seniors used to help them, learn from them, but now they are just ordering them around".

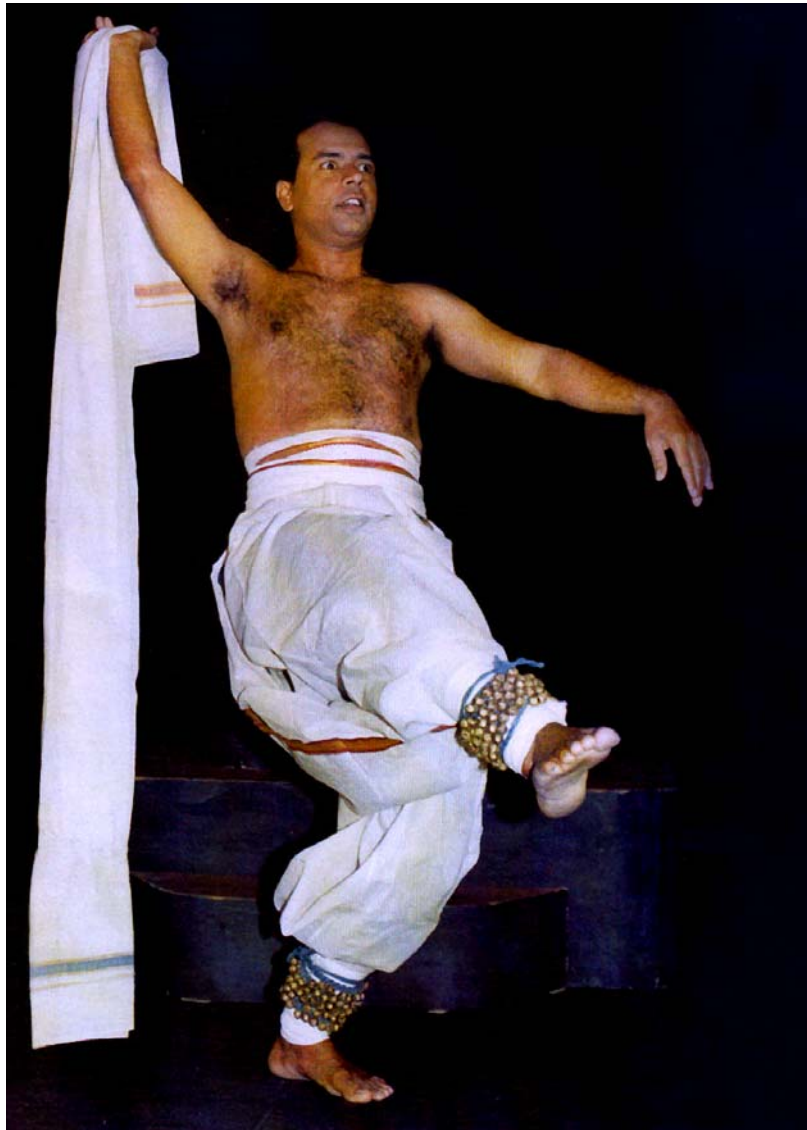
Here, where the world on stage is made, is now frontstage. The mysteries of theatre are displayed, so that which is the public food-stall area coincides with usually is kept within the backstage area. This is both a result of lack of space, a consequence of bad economy, and it is also a result of social practice – rough work like this shall be done outside. This reduces the hidden, or proper, backstage to a small belt within the theatre consisting of the green and dressing rooms and the stage behind the curtains. This change of front and back makes the theatre somewhat transparent, transparent as the fibreglass stage set of *Maramiya Mon* that will be discussed later. What you accept to happen hidden inside the four walls of the theatre, happens outside. The set is born in front of partakers. Only the building, the putting the pieces together and on their respective places, are done out of sight. When I first witnessed the making of a set I felt somewhat privileged, but I soon realised that everyone could participate in the observing. What I had learned should be opaque and what should be transparent turned out to be a bad map in my encounters with the citizens of Kolkata and their activities.

The juniors' activity of making the set turns a public place into a workshop. The building of sets is the responsibility and the work of juniors and consequently the seniors usually do not enter the backside. And this makes the public area also into a site of critique and discussions, comments and chats. Here they are masters of their own stage, like the dressing room at Nandikar's place.

## **Kolkata Effects**

A travel from the churchyard through the crowded streets of Shyambazaar to the Academy is like going down de Certeau's elevator from the roof of a skyscraper and back to the city's grasp (de Certeau 1984: 91-110). From the panorama narratives of the churchyard one enters into one of the major roads and the traffic jam. Encircled with advertising boards, moving through worlds of street vendors, beggars, business men, rickshaws, Coca Cola, Thumbs Up, Bata shoes, smoke, horns blowing, funeral processions, small trucks, large trucks, British Airways, graffiti poems, political rallies, rag pickers, lock smiths and computer saleswomen. This is not only old and new meeting – the modern city of Baudelaire – but Kolkata as the many *baajaars*, the theatres, the junctions, it has always been. Like the many names of the city as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that reflect its many histories and realities, there are also many geographies of the city. The discourses are many and exist in a multitude of different dialectical relations between place and society, matter and consciousness. But in order to comprehend an urban place – and the urban residents dwelling there – it is not sufficient to focus on the major trends and the largest building, leaving out the complexity when the complexity is a central defining aspect of the place. The act of analysing and theorising must never reach the point when it results in abstractions concealing the place and the society it is supposed to disclose. And in the name of disclosing let us go inside the Academy and watch Nandikar perform.

## 7 Stage Physicality



Goutam-da in *Meghnad Bodh Kabya*

In this chapter Nandikar enters the stage. After a presentation of the life at the playhouse, four plays are presented – two in Kolkata and two in Göteborg. The staging and performance of these plays are interpreted as attempts to disclose different experiences of globalisation. At the same time they show how Nandikar participate in the creation and reproduction of forces and flows, connections and imaginations that constitute globalisation.

## At the Theatre

[P]erhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. [...]

It is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined (Augusto Boal 1985 [1974]: 122,138 in Schechner 2002: 154).

To me, this epigraph captures one of the most important aspects of a Nandikar ideology as promoted by Sir. In his practical theatre work Sir seldom speaks about an ideological basis for the theatre he practises together with his co-activists. As mentioned before, the slogan of Nandikar was, from the group's beginning, that "good theatre is useful theatre". No words about a political (read communistic) ideology as so many of the contemporary groups advocate, at least through their motto. However, this does not mean that the founders and the descendants were not political active; they had only found other paths. The theatre ideology of Boal is inspired by Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I heard Sir refer to Freire once as someone who wrote about important matters and one that I should read. Through his and other participants', especially the juniors', emphasis on theatre as a method to understand humans and individual-society relations and become a better (societal) person, to say that Nandikar wants its theatre to be a method by which possible paths towards better worlds may be examined is, at least, not very far from the truth. Examinations of possible paths take place both during rehearsals and on the stage. It is on the stage the different "paths" are offered to the society, and through this act they are once again examined and re-examined in a never-ending process. On-stage performances are usually given priority by actors, theatre activists, theatre and performance researchers and social anthropologists when theatre is the topic, while I equally stress rehearsals and the off-stage life of the theatre activists. This is not done because I underestimate the importance of the performance proper, the on-stage performance in front of partakers. It is rather due to my conviction that an anthropological study of a theatre group and theatre must involve off-stage practises in order to make sense of performances proper.

The preceding chapters are attempts of describing practises and sites advancing both localisation and globalisation. It is aspects of these practises and sites that in the end are



presented on the stage. Nandikar theatre is a dwelling in some alternative modernities where the flows of localisation and globalisation play important parts. This theatre is not the only site and practise that dwells in modernity, that struggles to make our own times comfortable<sup>24</sup>. I see the on-stage versions of the theatre of Nandikar, both as a participant and an observer, as means to examine paths of engagement with the times we are living in, times where practises and sites of localisation and globalisation are important.

This chapter is an attempt to stage these engagements as efforts to overcome the conflicts between these, seemingly opposite, flows. The hybridity found in Kolkata, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, is an important point of departure when Nandikar enters a playhouse. Like Brecht's theatre theories and Tagore's works provide the participants with new ways of exploring and engaging with their world, and new methods of adapting this to the stage, the city of Kolkata offers images or conceptual maps that Nandikar activists use in their theatre. While much of Nandikar theatre is an effort to carve out a place from where trends of globalisation in the name of consumerism, homogenisation of cultural manifestations (Americanisation, Westernisation) and the "popular culture" of cable TV can be opposed, the participants employ different ideologies, theories and techniques which are equally part of globalisation. But again, some aspects of globalisation like modernity, is localised practises in the metropolis of Kolkata. It should be noted that there are many and equally important aspects to Nandikar theatre in addition to the mentioned dwelling.

The stage is both a place and a "non-place" (Augé 1995) – at the same time. The arched floor is a place where both the local/localisation and the global/globalisation is acted out and lived, communicated and consumed simultaneously. At the theatre the participants of

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<sup>24</sup> Dipesh Chakrobarty offers an almost similar description of *adda* (2001). *Adda*, as theatre, denotes both a place and a practise; it is translated "as 'a place' for 'careless talk with boon companions'" and as the talk itself or "the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations" (Chakrabarty 2001: 124). *Adda* is seen "as something quintessentially Bengali, as an indispensable part of the Bengali character or as an integral part of such metaphysical notions as 'life' and 'vitality' for the Bengalis" (ibid). In his historical study of famous *addas* of the 1940ties he show how *adda* may be seen as a struggle to cope with (capitalistic) modernity.

Nandikar experience that all the rehearsals they have gone through, in addition to every other experience they have had as engaged beings in Kolkata, the state of West-Bengal, in India and the world at large are utilized, are worth all the effort and contribute to the society.

## Theatre Life

Performing at a theatre, as a cultural practise, is described by some of the participants as a monitoring mirroring of society. The theatre-mirror does not only reflect representations of the society like an ordinary mirror. As a magic mirror, it creates new images and representations in an endeavour to understand society, interpret it and present it in a way making partakers reflecting upon it. Gupta asserts that the modern Indian theatre has “absorbed the cultural richness of the classical [Sanskrit] drama, the folk traditions [...] and above all the influence of the west” (1991:140). This has made the theatre capable to engage with, be practises and sites for, direct dialogues with different societies and individuals with separate life-stories in a society defined by its plurality and hybridity. Without absorbing Western influences the theatre would not be relevant to the partakers who live in worlds, that among a lot of different things, are influenced by the West. But theatre is not only a spaceless constructed practise, it unfolds over space (paraphrasing Jackson 1989: iv). The play-places are local manifestations of the global practice theatre has always been and still is. The play-places are a result of agreements between the performer and the partaker.

Performance is, according to Sir, the only social art form; it exists only when it is performed in front of partakers. As such, it depends on social agreements in order to establish a stage, a locus of interaction where both the performer and the partaker know what is going on. As the *baajaars* of Old Kolkata, the theatre halls of today are intersects of a wide variety of influences and inspirations that manifests themselves in the social art given names like stage drama (Turner 1982: 74), aesthetic drama (Schechner 1988), performance and theatre. The performance in front of partakers on a stage at a play-place (which usually equals a playhouse) completes the mixture, the synthesis, of an art form

firmly placed in a web of interdependencies stretching across the globe in several layers in a rather ordered manner. One's own position within this web affects how it is grasped and experienced.

## Actors

It is the practise of performing in front of partakers that defines a person as an actor. The Nandikar participants range from professional and semi-professional to amateur stage actors. But what constitutes a good actor?

Goutam-da told me about three ways of performing as three ways of seeing. The first way of seeing or experiencing is relating to your acting without reflection, the second is becoming something completely else and the third is watching like a *dev* or *devi* (god or goddess), from the outside. The third way of seeing should be an actor's goal. This is a common way of relating to acting found in many parts of India as a part of the lived tradition of *Natyasastra* (Schechner 2001). A *kathakali* actor from Kerala equally described how a

good actor is the one who understands the character very well, thus become the character itself. [...  
But] we should not forget ourselves while acting. While acting half of the actor is the role he does and the half will be himself (Schechner 1990: 36).

Schechner describes this actor as consisting of two halves: "The half actor who "does not forget" himself is the knower, the half who "becomes the character itself" is the feeler" (ibid: 37).

This form of reflexivity is something else than the inescapable reflection and reflexivity constituted by performance, which is always double (Turner 1982: 105). Every performative practise is a comment or a "meta-comment" since it is at a "mirror distance" from life (ibid.). This effect is not dependent on the "double actor" Goutam-da describes, which is, if not necessary, at least an actor's goal. Consequently, Turner never discuss the relations between performer and partaker with reference to this way of evaluating acting, or the effect this way of acting have on the actor herself. To put the last thing first; to be a

“double actor” bears on one level resemblance with Brecht’s notion of alienation, but it is more complex than this. As in Brecht’s theory of alienation, the additional duality of the actor who does not forget he is an actor results in a deeper level of reflection and reflexivity since this becomes an outspoken goal. In addition the emphasis on the double acting is important to understand the reason why many of the juniors are committed to stage acting. As previously mentioned, most of the juniors say they want to become *bhaalo maanus*, good people, through acting. This is something they feel they may reach through a better understanding of themselves and this understanding should depart from the reflexive double acting in front of live partakers with the direct response this results in<sup>25</sup>. At my first visit to the Academy to see a Nandikar play, Sir told me about a speech he gave at a Girls College. The issue was what theatre means to him. He said that through theatre, as the only social form of art, he learned about himself and humans in general. In ordinary life 8/9 of the human is hidden, but through theatre and the people involved with theatre the complete human being is revealed. Getting deeper than the tip of the iceberg, the organic theatre is important to him. To see like a *dev* is a central method to reach such an understanding of yourself and human beings and this is what the actors of Nandikar try to achieve when they are confronted with the partakers of a performance.

## **Partakers**

Theatre today is in a terrible crisis in India and Bengal, Sir says, because people has gone from a “to be”-attitude to a “to have”-attitude. And it is these people who are the partakers in Nandikar productions. Partakers to a theatre performance are imperative and part of its definition:

The body of live performance is unique in that, unlike the bodies represented *by* other media, it occupies the same time and space as the spectators (Counsell and Wolf 2001: 125).

As a partaker it is expected by Nandikar that one take part not only as a consumer who expects to be offered ready-made statements and good entertainment, but also as someone

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<sup>25</sup> The response given by partakers at the theatre are qualitatively different than the one they get from their co-participants during rehearsals, since partakers are “ordinary” people who have not witnessed the development of the play and the characters.

who takes part in order to engage as a being in the exploration of humanity, social questions or cultural practises.

The average partakers of Nandikar theatre in Kolkata have a rather similar background. They are all educated with a certain common knowledge about history and literature, and they are politically conscious, etc. In other words, they share roughly the same amount of both cultural and social capital, as well as economical. They represent a lifestyle which is both modern and in touch with the Indian traditions. Among these there are those who do not like the form of theatre Nandikar advocates and those who like it. The first group often feels that theatre should be a means to change the system; they want theatre as a revolution. They feel theatre can only be good when it reaches the masses with a social message. The other group appreciates Nandikar's form of theatre. They hold a view of theatre as art and as a mirror of the society. The social consciousness is something they feel are best advocated by a theatre that displays ways of engaging with different realities and contributes with new ways of understanding their own situation. Theatre does something to them as human beings, since it discloses parts of what it means to be a human.

In addition, also those who want pure entertainment visit the performances of Nandikar. How they react differ a lot, but the majority seems to enjoy most of Nandikar's performances because of its emphasis on musicality, visuality and physicality – but this is not always the case. After a performance of the play *Ei Saahar Ei Saamay*, one of the partakers was full of anger. The reason for this was the realistic nature of the issues raised; that it addressed sides of the society that are bad and un-comforting. He felt he had to face the reality every day and wanted the theatre to be a site of joy, a place of escape. In short, he felt fooled since the product he purchased did not coincide with what he thought he had acquired.

The World of Theatre might be wherever the theatre activists are, but the partaker walks to and from. They are citizens and part of the theatre community only when they are at the

theatre, and their engagement before and after are only preparations to, and reflections of, their experiences as members of this community. Partakers can play different roles in a performance. Usually they are not active partakers, but act as mere viewers giving response through laughing, clapping and shouting. Sometimes they are brought in as judges and given roles as true partakers. An example of the last type of partaker engagement can be taken from Nandikar's work with prostitutes. Prostitutes constitute a muted group and during the first workshop situations the main objective became to win the women's confidence. When this had been achieved they were very spontaneous; they would for instance more be than play Durga *devi*. The prostitutes want respect and a legal, organised work situation. They use their bodies to get food like other workers. Debbo-da wrote a play about a *devi* who came to the earth to find a good human being. The *devi* can not find any, but then someone tells her to search in the Red Light District. So the *devi* starts looking there and in the end she finds a good person. The only problem is that she is a prostitute and the *devi* does not like prostitutes. The actors then ask the partakers if there is something wrong in what the prostitutes do, if it is not possible to both be a prostitute and a good person. Theatre is a play of emotions and prostitution is a culture of silence. Through theatre the prostitutes were given a stage, a site, from where they could communicate who they were and what they wanted. The stage, in fact, made communication possible.

Being a partaker is felt by many Nandikar activists also as a special way to relate to the world at large – to be a part of it and not just wanting to consume it. Sir says that even as people do not visit the theatre very much these days, they have to face the theatre of every day life. Very quickly this view also becomes the juniors', who emphasise their way of engaging with their world as theatre activists, as performers and partakers. Without relating to facial expressions and body gestures it is hard to function as a societal being. If one is able to perceive this theatre as clues to how humans interact, one is able to learn how to become a better human, since this will make it almost possible to experience the world as it is. The idea is that through an understanding of human interaction, one, as a partaker, will be able to understand the life and living conditions of others more completely. As a

partaker of theatre performances one are supposed to learn this way of relating, to experience different ways of engagement and to use it in your everyday life. This is the role of the partaker according to Nandikar and this is what they relate to when they enter the stage.

## **Stage and Sets**

Sanchyan, the artist who made several of Nandikar's latest sets, is interested in the use of space in the non-theatre art he works with as well. "Art", he says, "has to break out of ordinary rooms and spaces – it has to create something new." In order to avoid being swallowed by the city he has decided to work in intimate or private spaces like people's home. They will often be off-limit to ordinary partakers, but he documents his work through sketches and videos, which in turn is exhibited. As a response to his ideas, I tell him I feel the division between public and private space has broken down in Kolkata, with reference to the street dwellers who lives in such a way that you never know when you are walking through someone's "kitchen". He responds by telling Kolkata is so much part of him that he cannot comprehend if such a divide is broken, he cannot see his city as such since he has his own private spaces here. But what he actually is doing is breaking down the divide between public and private by bringing his art into peoples home as an installation, and this is perhaps as much a comment to, or dialogue with, the public cityscapes as anything else. In fact, his work is a complementation of the actors work – they take their privacy onto the stage, while he takes the public into private spaces. This makes an impact on the stage sets he creates for and with Nandikar. "The sets," he continues, "were created three-dimensional, for people to interact with and not seen from just one side on a proscenium stage." He adds he would like to exhibit some of them in a gallery, in order to make the partakers interact with the places he creates as well. This might sound rather strange since they in fact were created to be on a stage and seen from a certain angle, but he said that making the sets as rooms people can interact with, is the only way for him to make theatre places.

The stage of Nandikar productions is a limited space in different ways. Firstly it is limited with references to backstage space and this makes it impossible to create large sets than can be changed during a performance. In addition the space is limited since the stage is only a given area. This limitation makes an impact on both the acting and the sets. Acting on a stage demarcates a theatre performance from performances outside the theatre building. It signals that this is not everyday life, what you will see is rehearsed and constructed. This otherness is also applied to make it a place for confronting what is outside; it provides both the performers and the partakers with a site of investigation and/or critique. Through the construction of, and interaction with, the imagined spaces created on the limited area of the stage through acting and the set engagements, relations, experiences or conflicts of those physical and cultural spaces in which the performance were conceived, and is performed, achieve more distinct contours and get more visible. The procedure bears similarities to the abstraction done in science in order to make a given field of study more visible.

A recent writer on postcolonial theatre has urged that the:

analysis of spatiality in [this kind of theatre ...] needs to confront the (sometimes tense) interaction between the imagined spaces invoked by the set, dialogue and stage action, and those physical and cultural spaces in which the performance takes place (Gilbert 1999: 3).

What is gained by such an approach to spatiality and place? Imagined spaces versus physical and cultural spaces. The stage in itself contains the imagined, the physical and the cultural. The imagined is the performative space invoked by the set and the stage action. An example of this is the performance *Gotraheen*. The stage consists of one set, but through the physical lay-out and lightning it produces the inside of a home situated close to the docks, the street outside and a nearby lawyer office. The office is invoked by illuminating it up and putting the rest in semi-darkness, the presence of the lawyer and the dialogue between him and his client. The actors and the partakers know very well that what they see is not somewhere near the docks, but they (ideally) accept it as a representation. At the same time the representation is more than an invocation of reality since the set often has symbolic signifiers imbedded. The theatre performance takes place on a stage and



invokes imagined places. The partakers and the actors are aware of the duality of the stage, as a place *for* performance and as a place *of* performance. They see the imagined, the physical and sometimes the cultural space. In the performances of Nandikar, imagined places are seldom created to purely reflect those physical and cultural spaces in which the performance takes place. The imagined spaces relates to the outside spaces through creating recognisable places like the kitchen in *Shanu*, at the same time as they offer something new – often through distorted lines and perspectives, surprising patterns and colours. Simultaneously a distance is build into the stage set and it is valorised beyond the ready-made and conventional furniture, architecture and gadgets most people build their own spaces with and through. Stage sets are unique designer products, used to both carry the identity of the group and the play. In addition they are comments on the social conventions of outside spaces.

## **Rituals**

Before a performance all the juniors are doing *pronam* on Swati-di and Sir to feel secure and safe. To do *pronam* is to touch the seniors' feet with ones right hand, or “wipe the dust” of them, before touching your own forehead and chest. Those at the same level in the hierarchy, especially the juniors, often embrace each other once, not three times like under the last days of the festival *Durga Puja*, or give each other a handshake and wish each other “good luck” or give “best wishes”. This well wishing is important to bind the group together. It is those who stand behind the production who makes themselves ready to enter the stage and communicate with the partakers, the others. A ritual of some sort before a play starts must be one of the universal actions in theatre; it is part of the common folklore about theatre, perhaps the whole group or individuals must perform a given ritual before they feel ready to start the performance. In Nandikar the rituals both express hierarchy and unity, hierarchy within the group and unity in opposition to those not part of it.

## **Theatre Rooms**

There is a definite practise in the use of the rooms in the theatres. Swati-di and the other women always get a separate dressing room, while the men sometimes just has to use the

backstage area. If there are any additional rooms, Sir gets one and then other major actors like Gautam-da and Debbo-da.

## **A Theatre World**

“Theatre is something that I live every hour. I think of acting all day and at night I dream about it,” Susanta says while we were taking a break from painting the last layer on some of the props to the following day’s first time performance of *Football*. The statement is programmatic, and Jahar nods and declares that he also lives like that, in fact every theatre person live like that. I ask what they were actually thinking about and both replied instantly: “Everything!”

Juniors like Susanta and Jahar feel that they inhabit the World of Theatre almost every second of the day, every day of the year. Being a Nandikar participants means more than just rehearsals and acting. Every aspect of production, from the creation of an army uniform to controlling the lights has to be learned. Jahar feels they have to do too much non-acting work. In addition he feels all the work and time he puts into Nandikar are not fully appreciated. This is quite common and it is a daily fight to get their work and contributions acknowledged. It is in a playhouse more than any place else their commitment to theatre is performed and evaluated. Even as they experience themselves as theatre activists and actors also outside the playhouses, off the stage, in the rehearsal room and the discussion at the *caa* stall, it is the performance on stage in front of partakers which give meaning to the this expanded notion of theatre. The performer, the partakers and the stage are what constitute theatre. While a theatre activist may use theatre activities instrumentally in different ways like giving children knowledge of their own emotions and their limits without entering a stage in front of partakers, this can only be understood as a consequence of on-stage performances and experiences.

The World of Theatre is there for everyone who can afford to buy a ticket to enter<sup>26</sup>; it is whenever you want it to be, and wherever you want it to take place. This does not implicate that the World of Theatre is something in its own right. As it is human

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<sup>26</sup> Occasionally there are displays of performances that are free, like out-door theatre in Nandan.

interaction as opposed to institutions which make up societies, the theatre world is only a visible shadow of the society. Sir never gets tired of repeating that: "Theatre is different from all other art forms because it cannot be duplicated. It is born every day and it dies every day. So theatre cannot survive without economical support, since there are no royalties." Theatre is something which has to be created every day, nothing lasts after a performance, it is not like a book or a painting which gets a life of its own when the artist has finished. This statement should be taken as a brute fact, perhaps the only real fact that may be presented when talking about theatre. Theatre is the interaction between the performer, the partakers and the stage, it is "living art". The experience these interactions result in is the fundament of the World of Theatre as explained by my informants. If performance is, as suggested by Turner (1982: 18-19), the means giving the best cross-cultural understanding (Asad (1986) advocates a similar view), then performances should also be the best way to communicate experiences of globalisation. Is then performance a global language? Nandikar participants stress that their theatre transcends the barriers of language and state borders. However, this does not imply that the performances have a global language, which everyone in the world can understand, and this is also something that Nandikar are aware of.

## **Kolkata Dwelling**

The bell has rung twice and the actors are in their positions both on and off the stage. Most of the partakers have arrived, but still there is a thin, but constant stream of partakers entering the theatre, and the ticket collectors show them their seats with lit torches. The performance is about to begin.

This part is a presentation and interpretation of two Nandikar plays with the emphasis on performative aspects<sup>27</sup>. The traditional way to analyse a production is from the partakers' point of view, in fact this is so usual that the scholar as a partaker is used as a point of departure to "characterize the scholarly work called performance analysis" (Martin and Sauter 1995: 15). To analyse a performance from the opposite side; be it as a performer of

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<sup>27</sup> Performance analysis is today the dominating practise in theatre studies in the endeavour to understand theatre (Martin and Sauter 1995, Helbo mm 1987). Another approach in theatre studies is textual analysis of plays.

a theatrical event, a technician, a helper or backstage worker would be “a most exciting exception” (ibid.). In the following analysis I will attempt to combine these two different points of view to make the event that a performance is represented in a more holistic way.

In the first play, *Maramiya Mon*, I was primarily a partaker. It was the first Nandikar production I experienced. It was at the Academy and it was the Bengali version. Later I also witnessed the play rehearsed in English and Goutam asked me to respond if there were parts that I could not understand. After the rehearsal I discussed the play with Goutam-da who directed the play as well as being the sole actor. In this respect I have not approached the performance as an average partaker. The second performance I will disclose is *Football*. In this play I was given a minor part and was able to follow the production from the rehearsals to the stage. Since my on-stage presence only lasted for a few seconds, I was able to act as a partaker during the rehearsals, but at the actual performances I had to stay backstage. Both of these plays are based on an attitude of questioning the present, but in quite different ways. *Maramiya Mon* explores the emotions and actions of a widower through explicit relations with the scenic space of the set and the props, the lightening and the partakers. As a play most Nandikar participants’ emphasise the way it displays the otherwise inner life of a man under great stress. However, it also creates a site for exploring the relations of man and his physical surroundings – the surroundings as expressions of the “inscape” of the character. The fact that the play is occasionally performed in English as a response to economical globalisation heightens the performance as a modernistic practise and site. This may seem contradictory, but later I will show that it is not.

*Football* was rehearsed as a Hindi-play, thus something out of the ordinary for a primarily Bengali-performing group. This time a non-Bengali language is used in order to reach new groups of partakers, preferably outside the state of West-Bengal. The play is also special since it is the third time they make a production of this particular play (first time in 1978). Thematically it develops around the old topic of conflicts between “the modern” and “the traditional”. But more interesting it is an epitome of the theatre practises that Nandikar

today advocates with emphasis on creating an intersect between musicality, visibility and physicality – which in itself is a reaction to what Sir calls “space erosion, in the name of global popular culture, that theatre is a victim of”. In very different ways, *Maramiya Mon* and *Football* confronts the performers and the partakers with new imaginations – in the form of performed practises and sites – that contain the possibility to make them engage with the present in slightly different ways.

## **Before the Theatre**

Before Nandikar enters the stage it is important to note that a theatre performance is not only what happens on the stage when the curtain opens, the interaction between the performers and the partakers. The play in question may start before the partakers can see the theatre hall. The first encounter for partakers with a performance is when they get acquainted with it. Announcements, advertising, press reviews, posters and para-texts such as programs (Helbo

1987: 165), or souvenirs as they are called in Kolkata, are parts of the performance. They introduce performances, tease potential partakers and present the play in question in a certain way. Goffman mentions impression management as the activity individuals and groups are engaged in when they construct themselves as counterparts in a given interaction (1971 [1959]: 203-230). In the same way it is important for the activists to create an impression of a performance, an impression they control, to represent their idea of the play and their need for many partakers. When a potential partaker to a performance learns about the play she usually do not know where she is going to see it, since the theatre groups of Kolkata are not connected to one single theatre hall, but uses different halls in different parts of the city to reach the widest group of partakers possible. But when she has decided on which play to see, and when to see it, the importance of location and other features of the theatre make a difference before they get there. A theatre hall has an image in the public, it has a history and a social life it may be expected most the partakers to be aware of. The theatre is a sign/symbol in itself; it might carry values of education, social engagement and make the visitors culturally competent. Take the Academy, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, it is at least by some seen as a venue for the theatre loving

intelligentsia – it is a site for and of connoisseurs. On the contrary, a theatre hall like *Girish Mansh* in North Calcutta is seen as a theatre for more casual theatregoers who enjoy more traditional, non-experimental plays. To be seen at a theatre and to be connected to the theatre as an individual (or part of a group) is instrumental to many in the formation of their identity. In this respect the playhouse constitutes an important role. In addition, plays are often chosen by a group as a reflection of the profile the group wants to have, of the image they want to communicate.

In this way, partakers to a performance are not only an accidental group of people who just happens to be there. Whatever their agenda is – be it love for theatre or an urge to appear as a connoisseur – it is often possible for the performers in advance to have a rough pre-understanding of what kind of partakers they will perform for, something they might adjust to in their performance.

### **Acting with the Set – *Maramiya Mon***

When I first met Goutam-da at Nandikar's place the first thing he said to me was that he was going to perform *Maramiya Mon* two days later and that he would very much like it if I could come. Two days later I am about to witness my first Nandikar production. I am excited and restless. I arrive early and am invited into the Green room where Sir lays on a bench while Bappa massages his hands. We talk about the state of theatre and he introduces me to a young poet who is present among several other non-participants of the group. She leaves a minute later. After a while I enter the theatre hall. The partakers are still restless; the bell has rung only once. When the curtains are drawn to the sides, and the play starts, there are still more partakers to come. And this goes on during the entire first act and during the second act people start to leave. As a consequence there is never complete silence in the hall. A cellular phone ringing in the second part also interrupts the performance.

A man dressed in army clothes enters the stage. He proclaims that everything is still all right when she is still here, because now he can go up to the drawing room

every minute and look at her lying dead on two card tables pulled together. It will not last for long, because the next day the coffin will arrive.

As a partaker I try to immerse myself into the performance, as a fieldworker I try to take notes on both the actors' practises and the other partakers behaviour. I remember Sir's description of the play while the monotonous circle movements of the actor are seducing me:

“For long, theatre – compared to music, painting and poetry – has often been booked for its failure to catch and convey the innermost experiences of the human soul. In humility, Nandikar tries *to catch the conscience* of a man. On stage, we *see and hear* the lonesome *inscape* of an endangered soul; in the process, we experience story-telling of a different *genre*.”

The story unfolds as the Ego talks to himself. We are invited into the Egos recollection of events as they lead up to the death of the woman, his wife, lying on the two tables. We learn how the Ego is a pawnbroker who marries the girl named Maya in both the English and the Bengali version. Maya is one of the customers and he feels she is a fragile girl who needs his care. The marriage is arranged between the relatives of Maya and the rich pawnbroker. But the Egos ideas of care and decent relations made the marriage impossible for Maya since she could not reach her man in any way, he was the solemn mentor more than the loving husband. After a while the Ego finds out that Maya is having an affair with another man. The Ego makes arrangements so that he can stand in an adjoining room to the room where Maya is supposed to meet her lover and there he himself witnesses the adultery. He takes his wife back home and the following day his wife makes an attempt to kill him with the gun he has bought for protection in his shop. After this incidence Maya gets ill for six weeks. When she recovers she spends most of her time in silence, alone at home, and now it is she who does not let the Ego get close to her. This goes on for some time and culminates in Maya jumping from a window committing suicide. This is the story the Ego tells us. We never see Maya or anyone else on the stage.

What the partakers witness is the Ego walking in circular movements, always to the left, always in the opposite direction of the clock, while he is talking and interacting with the set. The Ego never sets his eyes on the partakers, he always looks in another direction or above the partakers. As a part of the partakers you feel as lonely as the Ego, as unrecognised as he portrays himself. The play takes place in a set not representing the reality. A wall with several corners and two doors are at the same time both the background and the foreground. You are told that Maya is on the other side of the walls and the shadow of her is displayed through the semi-transparent walls during the performance. The Ego strolls around on the stage, through one of the doors and out the other, he sometimes stops by the wall, leans towards it and touches its surface, feeling its texture like it would tell him something, remind him of something or calm him down. In front of the walls is a desk with an office chair behind it and two small stools in front. A big clock is hanging from the roof in the front of the stage. In addition, the floor is decorated with a big dark carpet, with pathways in lighter colours.

I sit together with Sanchayan and we watch the rigging of the set he has made. We start talking about the set, but soon the theme is space. Sanchayan says there are little understanding and interest for space in Bengali theatre. The old activists used to be mainly left-wing actors who just used the stage to reach the partakers with a social message. The younger theatre activists of today have started to focus more on the art and are interested in the exploration of space. He refers to Goutam-da and *Maramiya Mon*, which among many things is an exploration of space. The process towards, and the construction of, the set were done in collaboration with Goutam-da and the rehearsal of the play.

While I was in Kolkata the solo performance was performed both in Bengali and English. Goutam-da performs *Maramiya Mon* alone. He uses every faculty he got – his voice, bodily expressions and the stage. The music has a Western edge and the lightning on Khoumik's stage set is as extraordinary as the stage set itself, changing the set completely. The Ego of the play uses various English sentences and words like "I am an educated



person”, “I am a proud man” and “Stupid! Stupid!”. The Ego’s dead wife’s name is Maya, which means the veil of illusion.

When the performance is over I talk to one of the trainees whose immediate response is that *Maramiya Mon* is one of his favourite plays and that he enjoyed the second part in particular. I am taken back to the green room and I feel my presence is not wanted backstage and in the area where the actor is relaxing after the show. But after a while someone takes me to Goutam-da’s room. He looks satisfied and tired, but not very willing to dissect his own performance. The following day, just after an in-house workshop session with the students still present, Goutam-da talks about the play. The play was chosen because, when he read it accidentally, it hit him as a mysterious and strange novel – it was extremely expressive at the same time as everything seemed to happen inside the Ego’s head. As a performance it would prove an exiting challenge to stage. When he started to rehearse on this one-man play he did it in English, almost directly from the novel. To do it in English meant that he needed to focus strongly on the emotional aspects since the language is not “natural” to him. I comment on the set, say I find it very exiting with the transparent material and the out-of-proportion size and he says the set and the space around him represents the psyche of the role figure. The colours on the semi-transparent walls with its circled motives, which through the lightning, are emphasised and de-emphasised communicating a sense of privacy and unworldliness. Remembering Sanchyan’s attitude towards creating sets, I experience the set, and the performer’s interaction with it, as moving beyond a complete breakdown of the dived between inside and outside, the private and the public. The set can thus be realised as a scape that is totally internalised. Like the cityscape that Sanchyan moves through, but are unable to reflect upon.

Knowing it as originally a Russian text I ask Goutam-da about the names given to the characters since they were Bengali. He replies that when they translated the play to Bengali they had to change all the names as the partakers identified them strongly to the persons. If a foreign name suddenly were used, it would create an artificial break. Several months later I see the play in its English adaptation, and on request I confirm with Goutam-da that to

me as a partaker there is of course a major difference. Not only did I understand every word, but this time I had also seen it rehearsed. I ask whether the different languages make an impact on the play for him. Goutam-da replies that it is very different to perform it in a different language. In fact he feels the character changed when played in English and the reason he gives for this is the British colonial heritage. Still – he said – English, in a way, demands respect and creates an image of proper behaviour. English connotes a feeling of subjugation and to make English the language of the character makes him a different person and thus changes the experience of playing him.

But why perform it in English? Sir says the “the English version is certainly not a result of any neo-colonial hangover. It is a pro-action in the wake of space-erosion theatre being subjected to by consumeristic culture of the day.” This implicates that the English version is an attempt to occupy a new place and create another site making the theatre communicate to new groups of partakers. The language of commerce, English, is used proactively to create a new site, if not within then at least close by the sites of “consumeristic culture” like in front of the cable TV, at the cinema, or the at shopping mall. With the use of English, Nandikar tries to enter a flow of information and goods that is often communicated in English or coming with English labels. In addition it creates a site for reflecting upon the use of English in the play. The creation of a new stage through the use of English also communicates something to the regular partaker, since this version gains a new message as a result of the connotations the English gives. The new stage is a part of the new message, it is a new inscape we witness on the stage when it is in English. This is not only a result of the partakers’ reaction to the language spoken, but to the fact that the actor himself stands in a different relation to the character with respect to the language of the day. Nandikar has also paved out a new site for itself to perform and reflect upon the use of language and its place in “consumeristic culture”.

*Maramiya Mon* is in many ways a typical Nandikar performance. It is an adaptation of a *bidesh* play, the set is non-realistic and very visual, and it is performed with a strong emphasis on physicality. On the opposite side it lacks any dance or song sequences so

common in Nandikar's performances. Debbo-da describes the play as intense, fanatical and psychological. It is, in its silent, controlled and almost stylised way, an outburst of emotions.

A central aspect of *Maramiya Mon* is how the actor interacts with the set; his movements on the stage and the lighting of the set are used to portray the inscape of the Ego. Emotions, or the mind, thus become a given engagement with a constructed place. Gray, as many other anthropologists, has shown that "[p]lace comes into being through praxis, not just through narratives" (1999: 443). The stage set alone is not yet place; it is an unrealised place carrying only a potential, a potential that must be relived by the actor(s). Goutam-da describes the set he engages with as in an actor itself, brought to life through his use and the different moods of lightning; it plays out his inscape. The transparent walls are used to avoid references to real buildings and make it possible project light from inside, where Maya is laying dead, onto the Ego. In this manner the inside becomes visible from the outside, through the walls. In *Maramiya Mon* practises and sites are mutually re-affirming and perhaps re-creating each other. When the Ego touches the wall with his hands and cheek and the light from inside enlightens him, he cannot escape the fact that Maya is dead, that she committed suicide after she became a part of his household. At the end of the play the Ego has to, literally, face the consequences of his failure to give Maya the love and attention she needed. Only when she is dead, her presence becomes evident to the Ego. He cannot escape her anymore.

### **Disclosing Practises of Athlete Philosophers – *Football***

It is in the middle of the winter and the Nandikar's National Theatre Festival has been running for four successful days with full houses. The day has come for the first time performance of Nandikar's own production, *Football*.

The stage is ready; the lights are adjusted, the sound has been checked, the stage decor is in place, some have marked the floor making fast set-changes possible and Jyoti-da has accepted it as completed. We are in the green room; a few are dressing

up. I can see Susanta-da doing the last touch on his make-up in the small provisional-looking dressing room in the south-western corner. Different costumes and props are arranged neatly on the benches, ready for quick costume and set changes. There are no loud sounds, only whispering. Bappa stands to my left; he shakes his arms and legs with rapid, and strangely enough almost invisible, motions. He turns and gives me a reassuring smile, lets me know that I will do OK on the stage.

Susanta and Subir wave me towards them, they skip out of the room and I follow them out to the small hall. Susanta lights a cheap filter cigarette, he inhales and gives the cigarette to Subir who after smoking a few seconds passes it over to me. We talk briefly about the shirt I am wearing; where I bought it, what brand it is and how much I had to pay. I ask if the price sounded fair, Susanta says it did, that I probably was not fooled to pay too much. Subir opens the door to the green room, making sure no seniors are about to enter and catch them smoking. The cigarette makes three rounds and Susanta throws it on the floor at the same time as the bell rings the first time.

Back in the green room there is more of a stir now, people walks in and out, between the rooms and the backstage area. I follow Subir as he walks behind the curtains, across the stage. We pass Jhulan-di who repeatedly rehearses her main character's first entry, whispering to herself. Subir enters the room that Sir is using. I stop outside. Subir waits until Bappa has done *pronam* and received a blessing in return, before he bends down and perform the same ritual. I do not enter the room as I find it almost impossible to do *pronam*; it is impossible in a physical way, I appreciate the gesture of respect, it is just that I cannot force my body to do it. Subir leaves the room looking for Swati-di, making faces to one of the stage workers on his way. He finds her in the dark backstage area, concentrating. He bends down and does *pronam*, she touches his head in an affectionate, but still distracted manner, and the bell is ringing for the second time. Now it is time for

everyone that has a role in the beginning of the play to enter his or her position on stage, the play is about to start.

The stage consists of several zones. By a combination of a second line curtain, lightning, acting and portable stage-sets, different places like Hari and his aunts home, his sisters home, the tribune of Yuba Bharati Stadium, a street, a court, a military recruit office, an employment agency office, streets and a factory are created.

Sohini's voice is heard through the speakers, she speaks what I understand to be the prelude to every performance: she asks the partakers to turn off their mobile phones and lets them know that recording or photographing is not allowed. In my dictionary I have read that Nandikar means "He who gives the prelude to a theatre performance", and I wonder what kind of prelude that the name originally was supposed to describe. The bell rings the third and final time and the curtain is pulled to the sides by Sarkar-da.

*Football* is the story of young Hari Purakayastha, East Bengal Club and a group of dedicated supporters under the supreme leadership of gang leader Shankar-dada. Hari is an orphan, brought up together with his now married sister by their prostituted aunt. Caught between the world of *Football* and the world of his sister and her dull middleclass, pedant of a husband Hari is fighting to define himself as both an individual and as a member of the society. Through a combination of talk-theatre, songs, dance and mime the performance lead us through this fight, which "ends with Hari a willing prisoner of the factory's wailing siren, retaining only a painfully wistful memory of early exuberance" (Festival presentation).

Out of sight of the partakers there is a lot of activity. A constant flow of people and objects circulate between the stage and the backstage area. It is a form of activity that is supposed to go unnoticed to the partaker. The engagement in this, to the partaker invisible, world of the theatre is an important aspect of what many theatre workers find attractive with theatre. One night, on a bus home from an out-of-town performance of *Football*, Debbo-da said

that to experience the activity backstage where someone delivers a lamp to someone who is going out on the stage at the exact correct moment creates the magic, is the magic, that makes theatre so appealing. As the *pronam*-ritual before a show is a performance, the backstage activities can also be described as an activity with performative aspects. During a performance like *Football*, with many set changes and actors on stage, the backstage work can be labelled as logistics. An actor leaves the illuminated stage and enters the dark backstage, with no time to adjust to the dark someone leads him to the other side where he 40 seconds later reappears on stage with a parcel in his hand. The second line curtain is pulled together and a scene takes place in front of it, leaving the actors off stage two minutes to change the set. Everything that goes on backstage is rehearsed. Everyone knows his or her responsibility. Again the urge is to act like an organic entity, to be parts of a body.

In this performance all three ideals or marks of a Nandikar performance is present – the musicality, the visibility and the physicality. Nandikar present the play as a mirroring “the acute and agonising restlessness of today’s youth who no longer have any respect left for our time-honoured values and are living in a moral and social vacuum”. This vacuum comes into being when “their” values are threatened; when the youth experience that other possibilities are present. The gap between modern and traditional values, between young and old, between the excitement of the *Football* field and dullness of the middleclass ideals, between the global and the local, between globalisation and localisation are themes that are investigated in this play. While the statement maintains an idea of paradise lost and implicit proclaims the dissolution of “their” values and any firm foothold for today’s youth, the performance’s gives a sympathetic portrait of Hari who epitomise the contemporary youth. This discrepancy or breach is intriguing, but perhaps an ideal typical example of globalisation with threatening external (“not our”) forces and new imaginations that paves the ground for creative dreams and practises. The traditional and pure are gone and it is the time of hybridity, of multiple choices, that undermines the societies’ firm foothold and cultural practises. Hari grows up in a time of rapid changes, together with his fallen aunt. His other two possible footholds are the dull and unsatisfied family of his sister

or the dangerous and unmoral life of the hooligans. None of which seems good. He wants firmness at the same time as he seeks excitement, he wants to be part of a traditional family at the same time as he has an understanding that the family no longer provides best basis for realising the youths' dreams of fame, wealth, social mobility, beautiful girls and fancy clothes. The performance displays the conflict, the antagonism or an Appadurain disjunction (1996; 2001) between the local ideals and global dreams, but does not provide a solution to it. When traditional local values are rejected this is portrayed as a loss, at the same time as the play shows that these values no longer provide answers to a youth who grow up in a time with multiple choices and new ideas of what makes life worth living. In the end, Hari's answer is to join the fold of manual labourers, nursing his interest of *Football* through the radio.

The discrepancy can be established on other levels too. While portraying a society with no firm foothold, the story unfolds through its melange of performative practises and ideas of what the partakers shall take part in. The play unfolds as a celebration of Kolkata's composite and hybrid past at the same time as it problematises hybridity. Through parts of dance and singing, the actors display an European musical tradition and the Bengali *jatra*, comment the play like in Brecht's epic dramas and provide tableaux of emotional states in accordance to *Natyasastra*. It all seems like a celebration to the connections that stretch through time and space, where flows of performative practises can be channelled by desire. And through this melange of practises external forces are displayed with reference to the lack of respect "for our time-honoured values". Nandikar activists provide no solutions; they only disclose their experiences of their own time.

## **New Performances, New Imaginations**

Theatre performances are among the practises that can be found in global flows and carry the potential to confront the performers and the partakers with new imaginations – in the form of performed practises and sites – that contain the possibility, emphasising possibility, to make them engage with the present in slightly different ways. The possible changes are probably more prominent among the performers than the partakers. Going to

see a play in Kolkata is part of established cultural practises among several middleclass groups, and as such it is something that perhaps more sustain than change. The same can be said about the performers, one show does not change their life unless it gets extremely good or bad reviews. But on the other hand, the entire process of rehearsing, preparing and performing a play several times always seems to give the participants new ways of relating to their environment, new imaginations feeding new associations and interpretations in the participants life. The time it takes, the sheer work used and the emotions invested in a performance that reaches its climax when performed on stage does something to the participants beyond making them feel part of a World of Theatre. Every actor knows that what s-he performs is a play, an abstraction from the real life, a symbolised exploration of human being. All the same, in a play like *Football* both hybridity with reference to actual performative practises and as a moral problem is rehearsed. The hybridity is both constitutive of the prevailing order and a threat to it, it is experienced as local and global, it advocates both discipline and dissent through its display of the hybridity's limitations and possibilities.

After this presentation of the two performances given in Kolkata, it is time to leave India and head for northern Europe and Sweden, to follow Nandikar as it as a Bengali theatre group enters a global flow that this time has its intersect at Göteborg Dance and Theatre Festival.

## **Göteborg Dwelling**

Nandikar has performed abroad on several occasions. In 2002 Nandikar is invited to present two performances in Sweden as part of the Göteborg Dance and Theatre Festival in August the same year. The two performances are of two different plays. The first evening there is a performance of *Meghnad Bodh Kabya* in a former coal cellar of the Post Office where Theatre UNO now has its stage. The second evening the performance is held at the new Göteborg Opera where *Shanu Roy Chowdhury* is staged. In addition, Nandikar gives three music-based performances in a set of arrangements named Bengali Nights<sup>28</sup>, as a



replacement for a group of Baul-singers from Bangladesh that was not able to bribe itself out of its country. These three performances are dominated by *kabitaar-gaan* (poems made into songs) and *naataker-gaan* (songs from theatre) and takes place in an old barn used to store flowers during the winter situated in Trädgården, a horticultural garden in the centre of Göteborg.

The flows of globalisation are not only going from the West to the East and the South, even though the exchange is unequal in many ways. In fact one of the important aspects of globalisation in the last decades is in fact the occurrence of non-Western countries: investment in the West. As self-acclaimed members of the world community of theatre, it is important for the Nandikar activists to display their performances outside the places where they originated and are usually performed. It is their way of resisting the unequal practises channelling the flows on various levels. Nandikar reaches a new place with its theatre, but to what extent is the message new or changed? Does Göteborg represent only a few new stages on which the Nandikar performers and the Göteborg partakers are dwelling into basically the same practises and sites? As practises and sites through which they both can approach the impacts of globalisation with reference to external forces and imaginations? If so, this would exemplify a similar modern attitude. Or, is it differences based on the performers and partakers' various backgrounds? If so, does it have to imply that topics Nandikar activists say they perform are not understood? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to know the Nandikar participants' and the partakers' understanding of the plays.

The week Nandikar spends in Sweden gives little time for leisure. From the date of arrival until the date of departure preparations and performances demands almost all the time. In

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<sup>28</sup> Bengal Nights is also a semi-autobiographic novel by Mircea Eliade (1994 [1950]). Eliade made enduring contributions to the notion of India as the place of spirituality and the Indian religions as a means for West to regain its own sense of lost spirituality. I guess the replacement of the devotional-singing and *gopiyantro*-playing beggar-monks by Nandikar lowered the level of sensed spirituality on the behalf of the Swedish partakers. The performances Nandikar gave included a Baul-*gaan* (song) or two, but were dominated by songs about Kolkata through the history. In fact, one of the songs they presented was not a song, but a rap.

this respect the week in Göteborg does not differ from the time in Kolkata; everything is centred upon theatre work.

## The Plays

This time the two plays are presented together in order to compare differences between them and how they relate to the actors and the partakers. The two plays are different on most levels. While *Meghnad Bodh Kabya* is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century (published in 1861) poetic rewriting of an old Sanskrit epic that Nandikar has adapted to the stage, *Shanu Roy Chowdhury* is a Bengali adaptation of a contemporary (first produced 1986) English play.

*Kabya*: *Kabya* takes us to pre-historic time and a great variety of characters; to *Rajas* (kings) and *Ranis* (queens), *Devas* (gods), *Devis* (goddesses) and *Pishaacs* (demons). It is the story about the Ravana, King of Golden City of Lanka, who loses his son when Rama, Crown Prince of Ayodhya, besieges Lanka in order to rescue his abducted wife together with the monkey god Hanuman. Queen Chitrangada enters Ravana's court full of grief and blames him for her sons' death. Ravana prepares for the battlefield together with his other son – Meghnad, also called Indrajit – Prameela's husband. The news of Meghnad joining the war reaches the Gods, and a conspiracy to kill him begins since he is an old enemy of Indra. Indra, King of Gods, travels to the holy mountain Kailash to meet Parvati to ask for her help. Parvati knows that Rama, on earth, also is worshipping her with the same desire. She wants to help them, but there is one problem. Her husband – Mahadeva, God of Gods, also known as Shiva – is the Lord and Protector of Ravana. However, with the help from Madana, God of Love, Parvati manages to seduce her husband and in a state of passion he agrees that Meghnad is to be killed by Rama's brother Lakshmana, aided by Mayadevi, the illusive Goddess imagined by poets. Indra makes Mayadevi agree to go to Lanka to cast a spell on Meghnad since they know he cannot be killed following correct codes of war. At the time Mayadevi leaves for the Lanka, celestial weapons are sent to Rama for his brother to use. Lakshmana is convinced to go to the temple of Chandi at the northern gate of the Lanka and there, after he finishes the dangerous journey, he receives a boon of becoming invisible. Now he can enter the City of Lanka and kill Meghnad. The

following day in Lanka, Prameela and Meghnad kisses for the last time and goes off to meet Queen Mandodari. The Queen blesses her son who shall go to the temple where he alone and unarmed has to perform the Nikumbhila Yajan before he goes to the battlefield. His mother is ill at ease, she feels something terrible is going to happen, but Meghnad assures her and leaves. Now Mayadevi has arrived in Lanka and at her request Lakshmidivi, the patron Goddess of Lanka, leaves her seat and the city. Lakshmana, invisible, enters the premises where Meghnad is performing the Yajna. Meghnad is mediating when Lakshmana appears. He is taken aback and asks for a little time to face his still invisible enemy with arms for it is unethical to attack an unarmed soldier. But Lakshmana hits Meghnad immediately with an axe. As a final effort Meghnad attacks with whatever he can lay his hands on – the bell, the offering bowl – and it looks like he is going to succeed. There, Mayadevi enters and mesmerises him, foils all his efforts and makes the task simple for Lakshmana. Meghnad dies in the unholy combat. Ravana leaves his throne and sits on the floor. Meghnad is laid on the funeral pyre, Prameela prepares for *suti-pratha* (widow burning). When the fire is lit they are taken to heaven by a celestial chariot and in their death they become even more beautiful than ever. When the funeral rites are completed, the people of Lanka sadly returns to the city like people coming home after immersing the image of Goddess Durga in the Ganga on the day of *Dusserah*, the last day of *Durga Puja*. And with this the one-man performance about the brave men and women, the cowardly and traitorous, gods and goddesses, ends.

*Shanu*: Shanu's story is different. Here you will meet no *Rajaranis*, *Devas* or *Devis*. As mentioned in chapter 5, in this play we are invited to share some of the thoughts, views, experiences and adventures of the upper middleclass woman Shanu. Triggered by an invitation to join her girlfriend on a holiday to Pokhara, Nepal, Shanu declares the small and minor disappointments in her life as a wife, a mother and a neighbour with a lot of humour and a dash of soreness. In the memories of who she used to be we understand quickly that she feels she has changed into someone she does not like. Realising this, she leaves her husband a note and off to Pokhara she goes. There she is left by her friend and

gets involved with the owner of a lakeside restaurant. Her husband urges her to come back, but she resists and in the end he travels to Pokhara to win her back.

*Kabya*: The set of *Kabya* is as simple as the acting is complex. Three pedestals, the largest one in the middle and the back of the stage and two minor ones placed on each side of the stage. To the left, in the background, there is a sculpture of a bow with an arrow, symbols of Rama. On the right hand side, at the very front of the stage, are the musicians. Goutamda is the sole performer; he is the *kathak* (storyteller) and the characters he is telling about. He declares and he sings, he dances and he stands completely still. In the words of the Bengali poet Sankha Gosh, he presents a “composite style out of our own indigenous tradition. The [...] language of *Meghnad Bodh Kabya* is being brought to us with an intimate tone, with dance mudras and sometimes even songs” (*Kabya* souvenir). Goutamda is dressed in traditional manners with *dhoti* (see picture in the beginning of this chapter), a loose piece of cloth, bells around his legs and barefooted. However, the performance is contemporary in several ways. The acting, as a composite style based on Bengali and Indian traditions; it is new in its hybridity. If there is such a “movement” as a Kolkatan post-modernity, this would be an example of this due to the de-construction of the traditions and the following re-construction of a new performative form and performance never seen before. The elements of *mudras* (hand gestures with explicit meaning), facial expression according to the list of emotions in *Natyasastra* and the dancing are found in traditional Indian theatre (Sanskrit theatre, *Kathakali*, *Kutiyattam*, *Chau*, etc.), but in the specific combination, and with songs, it represents something new. This in addition to the instrumentation, with non-traditional instruments like the violin and musical idioms borrowed from masala movies. The stage represents contemporary ideals with its minimalist set and lightning. The text is presented as it was written, in a new and archaic Bengali, with a syllabic rhyme scheme called *payaar*, where syllables generally have a uniform length-value, difficult to understand even for literate Bengalis of today. I write “new and archaic” since the language and rhyme scheme are old, while many of the techniques are said to be new. *Payaar*, for instance, developed from earlier (Bengali) rhyme schemes and was defined as an independent scheme by the end of the thirteenth

century (Sen 1979: 18). But the poem is strongly influenced by the European rhyme techniques and as sources of influence are European poets like Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso and Milton mentioned (ibid: 199). In addition, occasionally classical Greek ways of characterisation and expression have been proved (ibid). At the same time is this an Indian and a Bengali poem with its use of Indian rhetoric (ibid), the Ramayana and *saadhu bhaasaa* (elegant or refined language) – the traditional literary style with highly Sanskritic vocabulary and archaic verbal and pronominal forms based on Middle Bengali (ibid: 8).

*Shanu*: In *Shanu* there are two sets, one for the house scenes and one for the Pokhara scenes. During the first part there is a gauze – a transparent wall or a veil – between the actor and the partakers. The simple furniture is twisted in shape and decoration, turned into sculptures. In this environment Swati-di impersonates Shanu. As she goes about her household duties, drinking her Pepsi and making *aalu dum* for dinner, she talks to her only true friend, the wall. The movements are the movements of a saree-dressed middle-aged woman dreaming about her youth, about a sexuality she never learned to appreciate. She works as she has done for the greater part of her adult life, it is all routine. The insecurity of her movements, when she is lost in thoughts about youth, is obvious, she herself laughs at them. But through her recollection of past dreams she gains more confidence, she changes into a *saalwaar kaameez* – an unmarried girl's dress – the veil-wall is pulled up and she leaves for Pokhara. After the intermission the set has been changed. A table is present, a tree and what perhaps is the remains of a boat or a stone are all that can be seen. Shanu enters in a shirt and jeans – not even unmarried girls should wear suchlike. She has rejected her modern *purdhaa* and left her *aantaahpur* (private quarters)<sup>29</sup>, the suffocating embrace of home and her society. While the situation for women certainly has changed a lot since the age of *suti-pratha*, the society promotes women to aspire to become a *sumata* (good mother) and a *sugrhini* (good housewife) (Bagchi 1990; Ray 1990), these are virtues Shanu breaks with. She is again the vital youth she was before marriage; she has regained

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<sup>29</sup> Curiously enough, as an illustration of a woman leaving the *asnthapur* the historian Bharati Ray, in an essay about the women in Kolkata (1990), uses a picture of Swati-di as Bimala in Sayajit Ray's movie *Ghare Bhaire* (The Home and the World).

her body. Still, years of embodied marriage confines her sometimes, when she enjoys her Pepsi, when she lets her curiosity guide her into the arms of a stranger. But she accepts that, because most of the time she feels good about the sap in her body running wild. A stone has taken the walls place as her confidential friend. In Göteborg Swati-di translated around 50 percent of the Bengali version into English, making it easy to understand the very verbal and modern language.

## **Nandikar Perceptions**

Even as different as these performances might look, there are similarities. Initially there is the fundamental understanding that both of these plays have something to say to partakers of today. In addition it feels meaningful to Nandikar to work with the plays. Of course, time is only invested in plays they feel meaningful, both to them and the partakers. The question is why? What is it with these performances that are experienced as meaningful? Why bother to spend so much time on them and present them to partakers?

*Kabya*: In the foreword to the *Kabya*-souvenir Sir writes that he, as a senior, feels the play as gift “when waves of faceless multinational consumerism are trying to engulf the cultural scene of our Rupasi Bangla<sup>30</sup>”. So, at least to Sir, *Kabya* is a response to the present day trends of external forces in the name of a capitalistic modernity as it is experienced unfolding in Bengal. In this respect the play could be described as a “creative adaptation” of modernity, a production through “a cosmopolitan mode of dialogue and engagement” of an alternative modernity far away from “colonial mimicry” (Gaonkar 2001: 20-22). It is a creative adaptation of modernity since it, as a performance, primarily uses idioms of the past with a touch of contemporary practises in order to comment on a present situation. It represents a cosmopolitan mode of dialogue and engagement precisely because it uses performative practises that are based on knowledge about both indigenous traditions and an experience of space erosion in the wake of multinational consumerism. However, presenting *Kabya* as an example of an alternative and cosmopolitan modernity might seem

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<sup>30</sup> *Rupasi Bangla*: (lit.) Beautiful Bengal; it is (always) connected to a sonnet by Jibanananda Das with that name, where he pays homage to his motherland Bengal (1972: 46).

strange when one remembers the story of the play, but *Kabya* is often perceived as an allegory of the British colonisation, about how the Britons with the help from indigenous traitors won control over Bengal after the mentioned Battle at Palashi. And after the Ayodhya incidence, where thousands of people, primarily Muslims, were killed in the name of Rama, the crown prince of Ayodhya according to Ramayana, the play is also a comment on religious fanatics and communalism. Gods and Goddesses are not in themselves a guarantee for righteousness<sup>31</sup>.

The modernity of the *Kabya*-performance as it relates to forces of economic globalisation is more obvious when remembering the before mentioned contemporary and modern features of the performance. To imagine a staging of the same performance say 20 years ago is hard, as it can be described as a counterattack against economical liberalisation of the 1990s through a conscious revitalisation and re-composition of different performative practises that are experienced as indigenous.

Moreover, this approach also implies a breach with the post-Emergency euphoria to re-establish Indian authenticity of a pre-Nehruvian past through propagating, on a national level, an “invention of tradition, whereby a back to the roots anti-modern/anti-realist/anti-Western policy” (Bharucha 2000: 33). At the same time, the play is set in opposition to external forces, through the use of practises that is the result of contact. The creative use of traditional performative practises does not imply a back-to-the-golden-and-pure-roots-ideology, it is experienced as a new creation referring to older practises. A majority of Nandikar participants describe performances of traditional Indian plays through indigenous performative practises that seeks to present the original and the pure as unable to communicate and engage with the present since most of them have not developed together with the society that they should be a part of since long before the Mogul invasion. They become museum pieces, dead artefacts of a golden age. In *Kabya* they use some of these practises, but in a new melange in order to comment and engage with the present.

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<sup>31</sup> A theme that often also occurs in many Greek tragedies, such as those of Euripides.

*Shanu*: This solo-performance is Swati-di's play. She is alone on the stage; all music is recorded in advance, she alone – when the final bell rings – must carry the performance to the partakers. During a workshop at a girl college, she and Sir urges the students to buy tickets to a following *Shanu*-performance, presenting it as a play about women and their situation, something that they as girls of today should be able to appreciate. And many of the girls bought tickets the following day – to themselves, their parents (most mothers turned up) and siblings (the sisters seemed over-represented) – and on the day of the performance they really enjoyed the play. To the juniors of Nandikar, *Shanu*, besides telling a story of how tradition and habit both can suffocate and consequently be escaped, is a lecture in acting. Swati-di is their teacher and they are her students, through engaging in *Shanu* they learn what they are told. *Shanu* also presents topics that are not much spoken of, be it in the public or in the private spheres. Female sexuality, runaway spouses and the satisfaction of extramarital experiences become alternatives to given situations through the performances. In India at large these topics are seen as part of the modern and globalised India, something that is not part of their tradition. I talked to one Kolkatan male in his mid-thirties who see *Shanu* as displaying and inducing a reality far away from what is Bengali, something you in India only would find among the most upper-class groups in Delhi or Mumbai. And it is true; *Shanu* represents not the ideal typical Bengali housewife, but who does? That *Shanu* is un-Indian to some is not controversial. To many others, like Swati-di and the most of Nandikar, she addresses topics that are important in their own time and place. Even if it was a display of “reality far away from what is Bengali”, *Shanu* would be a discussion of these un-Indian motifs and topics India is so full off according to the critics. Being accused of presenting something un-Indian was not unexpected to Nandikar, and part of what they want. In Nandikar, and among others who have seen the play, *Shanu* represents a re-action to her present situation. She literally acts within and according to her own world.

*Kabya* and *Shanu*: Both plays are contributions to an engagement with performed reflections on a sensed contemporaneity where globalisation is present. Both plays are



invitations to participate in discourses or disclosure where modernity is among the subject matters. But they are so in very different and perhaps contradicting ways. While *Kabya* seems to represent an attempt to restrain global flows that are experienced as external threats, *Shanu* can be understood as a celebration of global flows creating new imaginations of independency with the possibility to liberate individuals from the yoke of sedimented social practises. To Nandikar this is not a contradiction, as globalisation is neither good nor bad in itself. As Kolkatans, Bengalis and Indians – as most people in the world – their heritage is a result of global flows, of external forces and connections. This, however, must not imply that they appreciate all the aspects of present day globalisation. In search for an always better understanding of societal being they feel consumerism and cable TV as a threat since they experience it as forces that remove people from engaging with their surroundings. Again, this does not imply that they have adopted Feyerabend's phrase that "Anything goes" (1978), with the modification, "as long as it promote engagement". Among many other things, to the Nandikar participants *Kabya* is a counterattack on external forces as multinational consumerism and *Shanu* is a celebration of external connections that provide new liberating imaginations.

### **Partaker Perceptions**

I did not have the opportunity to stop a representative selection of the festival crowd as they left the theatre running for a new happening in order to interview them about their views on the performances. However, I spoke to a few and read a review, thus feel it possible to say something about what the partakers understood.

*Kabya*: To the average partaker of *Kabya* at Theatre UNO the story is available to them as a very short introduction in Swedish in the festival program and in longer English version in the souvenir that Nandikar sells. In addition, Sir gave a short introduction of the group and the play before the performance proper. It is therefore unproblematic to expect that most of the partakers understood the basic storyline of the play. But what did the performance tell them beyond being a historical play performed within the idiom of Indian performative traditions? Let us first turn to what a Swedish theatre critic, Kristjan Saag,

writes about his experience. He starts with a negative critic of the present state of theatre in the West where actors find it easier to undress on stage and represent a modern *Miss Julie*<sup>32</sup> than to work out a choreography or distinct role of their own, and then he continues:

The Dance and Theatre Festival is full of examples of dance, circus and, to a certain degree, theatre where traditional forms of performing are broken down; where the serious is replaced by the simple comedy, and body, emotions, contact with more or less fluent concepts. How reliving then, with a piece of genuine Asian theatre craft, performed with a master's decency and obviousness – without fearing the critical eye that wants to dismount all solid forms.

When the Indian actor Goutam Halder, one of the members of the theatre group Nandikar, performs the story of Queen Prameela and the warrior Meghnad, every self-reference and all self-irony is lacking. The actor knows what he can, knows that his artistry is going to be appreciated and gets, without a single second of seeking contact outside the ramp, the complete concentration from us. How does he do it? This is not all about skilfulness, but also about his way to gestalt. Goutam Halder is at the same time both the storyteller and a thousand characters: gods and warriors, beautiful court ladies and bandits. With a simple movement of the hand he moves a loose piece of cloth from one shoulder to the other, wraps himself into it, ties it around his forehead: every change marks a new role. But what makes me completely lose my mind in the minimal auditorium of Theatre Uno is the body language. I do not understand a word of what he is saying, but the stylised movements of Halder build worlds of meanings: characters, places, situations. He makes almost no movements with the arm that is not followed by his gaze. The gaze extends the movements, creates a room for the character (*Saag Tomrummet fylls med energi* in GT, August the 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 (my translation)).

It is evident that metastories about multinational consumerism, colonialisation or religious fanatics are not experienced as a topic to the theatre critic, and this also applies to most of the other partakers. To them, the play is mostly about the acting in itself, about how the

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<sup>32</sup> “Miss Julie – A Naturalistic Tragedy” is August Stindberg's 1888 play about sexual repression and class schisms. Tells the story of an aristocratic young woman who seduces her father's ambitious valet. After the sexual thrill is gone, the couple find that they have nothing in common, and the woman must struggle with the consequences of her actions.

actor displays the story in a way that makes sense. It makes sense because they appreciate his songs, speech and movements as communicative of the battles between good and evil, the flirt between men and women, the intervention of gods and as an introduction into something archaic Indian. Speaking of archaically, this play uses and re-interprets the idioms of past performative traditions but in a highly modern way. This is hard for the European partakers to see since they are not habituated to this, due to lack of own indigenous theatre traditions or knowledge of the Indian ones. But what the Göteborg partakers see is a performance set in a blackbox theatre during a theatre festival presenting modern performances of a wide variety of forms. In addition, there is the artistic lighting playing its part in a modern way. The theatre critic represents the view of the partakers I talked to; the most impressive part of the performance was the overwhelming display of acting abilities, the pure craftsmanship, the performing body's ability to communicate different emotional states and recognisable social relations from war to love. Roughly, it is perceived as a performance where the acting in itself is the main topic. This way of engaging with a performance equals ideals that are important in *Natyasastra*, where the partakers ideally should be taken through different states of emotions as they witness the play. The emphasis is experiencing these states of being, not the history told (Schechner 2001). As a partaker not able to understand the language and unacquainted with the story, the performance seems to be experienced by the Göteborg-partakers as described in *Natyasastra* and not according to the tradition, dating back at least to Aristotle's *Poetics*, emphasising the development of the story that are more common in America and Europe. To the average partaker in Theatre UNO, *Kabya* is not a commentary on globalisation, but an example of it.

*Shanu*: *Shanu* presents an almost totally different experience to the partakers. It is a play many knew from either other productions or from Luis Gilbert's screen version<sup>33</sup>. And

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<sup>33</sup> *Shirley Valentine* (1989): directed by Lewis Gilbert II, who also has made a screen version of another Willy Russell play – *Educating Rita* (1983).

since Swati-di translated a lot of it into English, the storyline was communicated well to those who knew English. The topics are based on present day conflicts one expects most of the partakers to be familiar with; they may partially have experienced them themselves or know someone who has. Many of the partakers saw the performance as a Western play that now returned after a visit to India. They saw it as a performance of an Indian modernity set within both the idioms of the West and the Bengali everyday life. The presented situations are familiar, while the settings are new even as the set is highly stylised and clearly does not re-present a realistic copy of reality. In this way *Shanu* is very different from *Kabya* where the minimalistic setting can be seen as familiar. While the most frequent responses to the play were positive (I spoke to somewhere between ten and twenty males and females of different age groups), some were negative (two middle-aged males). The negative ones meant the play was too typical European, implicating that the adaptation was unsuccessful or even impossible. They felt it was not genuine enough and that performances done in the West paid more respect to the play. Perhaps their dream of India broke? A housewife who discusses marriage problems, runs away and gets a lover is perhaps not what some wants to see from India. While others see *Shanu* as a glimpse of realities usually off-limits, some sees it as negotiation of their comprehension of the indigenous, the true representations, the clean and un-hybridised. Both the negative and the positive responses in Göteborg equals perceptions experienced in Kolkata. At the same time the topic raised by Nandikar, according to new imaginations of liberation, was understood by most of the Göteborg partakers.

Being obviously contemporary, *Shanu* is more challenging in its treatment of topics that are also part of the partakers' life. We are confronted with our own living and choices – with our own life-worlds – in a very immediate way. *Kabya* is never directly a challenge in the same manner to the Göteborg partakers, being based on an old epic it gives the possibility to escape spaces where your own living is challenged. Also, when it comes to the style of acting, *Shanu* is more open for discussion and criticism, since it is done within performative traditions also the Scandinavian crowd is used to. While *Kabya* has aspects of for instance alienation that could be understood as Brechtian, the form, with its stylised

*mudras* and unfamiliar dressing, is closing the known that makes familiar forms of criticism possible.

## **Göteborg Departure**

The Nandikar participants are satisfied with their Göteborg stay both artistically and financially. The last performance takes place on Friday evening. The activists have already packed since two of them will leave with me for Norway just after the show is finished (around 11 pm), while the rest departs early in the morning the following day. In addition to huge amounts of light filters in a wide variety of colours not easily available in Kolkata, a salary adding a little bit to their financial security and the experience of the Scandinavian social-democratic well-fare society with its show windows advertising goods to a price far out of reach, they bring with them the experience of performing to non-Indian partakers.

The Nandikar activists believe they have something to perform, display and communicate to the outside world, the theatre-world which they feel so much part of and this is one of the steps in that direction. What do they want to bring out beyond their home playhouses and its partakers? There are several answers to this. They are proud of their achievements as a group and want to perform this. In meetings with new partakers a new dynamic is created and it helps the performers to advance on their own quests of reaching new shores of performances. They want to display their Kolkata, their West-Bengal and their India as something that is far beyond the newspapers dwelling into tragedy and the popular cultures' idealising images. In this it is a performance of an idea of humanity that connects rather than divides. Important to many Nandikar participants is the quest towards becoming a better person and through displaying this quest on stage they want the partaker to take part on their painful and joyous adventure. Sweden received them well and, consequently, they must have made an impact of some sort. At least they presented a window of their own into some examples of being – of their conceptions of humanism – that made sense even if they were perceived as Indian or Bengali or Kolkatan.

In the beginning of this Göteborg section I asked if the performers and the partakers dwelled into roughly the same practises and sites working out the impacts of globalisation with reference to external forces and imaginations, and thus exemplifying a similar modern attitude. In relation to *Shanu* I will assert that they did. Of course there are differences, but the overall perception of a women breaking out of the confines of her home and the society due to external impulses is the same. As a theatre performance the partakers also understood the play as an investigation of new imaginations triggering off new practises. *Kabya*, on the other hand, was not perceived in the same manners as within Nandikar. In addition to the perception of the play found among the Göteborg partakers, the Nandikar participants' (and other Indians, especially cosmopolitans and intellectuals) are able to decode several more aspects of the play. While resistance against "waves of faceless multinational consumerism trying to engulf the cultural scene" is an expression of experiences that are equally common to many of the Göteborg partakers, they were not able to see the play as expressing these common experiences due to a lack of knowledge of the performative practises the play are moulded in. While *Kabya* to Nandikar represents a highly modern practise in the name of being a critical engagement with the present, it was primarily an exhibition of tradition to the partakers.

## **The Plays as Practises and Sites Disclosed**

A performance is a practise that plays a crucial part in constituting the stage as a place. But in addition to make stages, a performance also creates other places, new places, known and unknown. Theatre is, like the performance of *Maramiya Mon*, mainly about creating places where people can meet in joy, sorrow, festive celebration and mourning; a place of reflection, be it conscious or not. The performative action cannot take place without a stage and a stage cannot exist without performances. As practises and sites at the same time, theatre carries the possibilities to investigate social experiences like globalisation and localisation that are defined with reference to culturally embedded, human initiated practises and to sites which privileges the spatial above the temporal. (Other social practises could of course be examined and the temporal could been given all privileges, but that must be in another thesis.) Moreover, the aspects of Nandikar theatre that I stress are –

through its modern practises and sites – investigations of sensed globalisation.

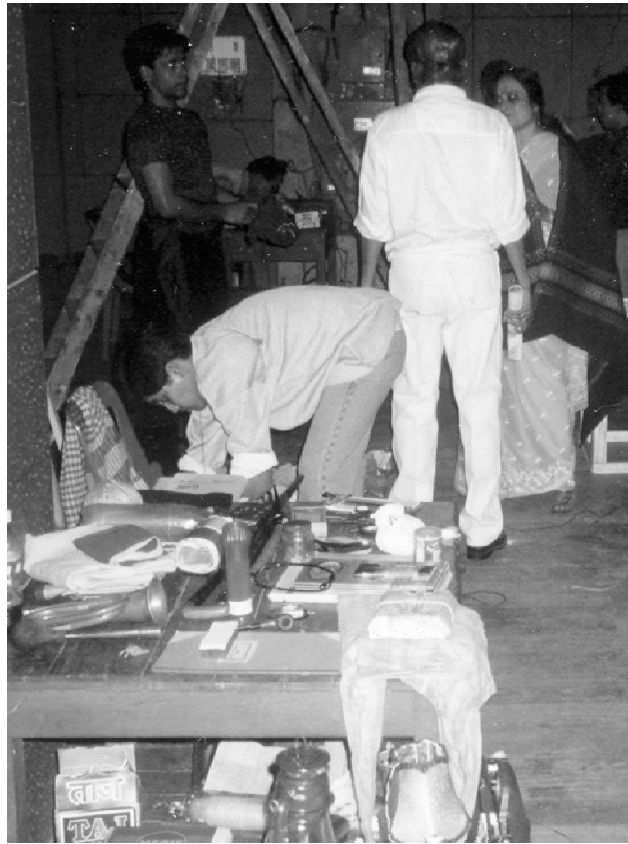
Anthropologically speaking, what does this mean?

A performance is a redressive and reintegrating action at the same time. Turner writes that “redress has its liminal features, it is being *betwixt and between* and, as such, furnishes a distanced replication and critique of the events leading up to and composing the *crisis*” (1974: 41). If the crisis is a combination of the necessity some feels to become actors and the themes they choose to work with during a performance, then a performance becomes, as a part of the redressive phase, the interpretation of individual actions and the groups place in the society. But at the same time, a performance is part of the reintegration phase. It might not, as Schechner says, either heal the breach or schismogenesis (1988: 187). A theatre group is not just a social entity determined by the laws of rituals or the forces of social life. A theatre group consists of members with abilities to reflect, interpret and disclose. Nandikar’s motto is that good theatre is meaningful and helpful theatre. Nandikar theatre shall be not just theatre, but theatre with a difference. The activists want not to heal breaches and discrepancy or resolve crises in the society at large; they just want to disclose these breaches and crises to themselves and the partakers. They want, on behalf of themselves and the partakers, to engage with their own times, practises and places, and they want to perform and display this never-ending disclosing engagement. Moreover, in the end I think this is what theatre of today is mainly about. Turner and Schechner’s focus on the healing as essential to reintegration fails to underline this aspect. The reason for this is probably their evolutionary interpretation of performative traditions, making modern theatre almost a powerless reflection of society or a law controlled resolving of crises. In other words, their description forgets or rules out agency and reflection. However, making crisis a point of departure is important, at least with respect to Nandikar’s theatre. The crisis in question is often the flows of globalisation and localisation, of a modernity, which they are an important part of, and thus are able to confront. Through their theatre the Nandikar activists participate in these flows of globalisation and localisation, they want to be “a difference which makes a difference” (Bateson 1972: 271-2), and this endeavour adds to their formation of identity both as individuals and as a group. The performances

Nandikar gives are modern both with references to the acting and the sets, to the practises and sites. As demonstrated above, the on-stage performance is a display of practises and sites investigating and examining the endeavours the participants makes in their lives in general and through their rehearsals. Consequently, the practises and sites of the stage combined become modern investigations of sensed globalisation and localisation. To Nandikar, theatre offers the means by which possible paths towards understanding and engagement may be examined.



## 8 Going Home



Backstage at the Academy

Kolkatan modernity, as practised by Nandikar, often advocates distance in order to interpret and understand conditions of societal being. Therefore this chapter starts with a brief examination of the time after an on-stage performance, when the participants get the performance at a distance both with reference to time and space. Subsequently, I will summarise the major findings of this thesis and present a conclusion advocating awareness to processes of globalisation.

### **Dismantling the Set**

Cooldown. The performance is over, the partakers leave the hall and the actors start to dismantle the set. The dismantling of the set is routine and is done fast, everybody want to get home as soon as possible.

In this thesis, Nandikar has been followed as its activists move, from their homes to Shyambazaar Street and their rehearsals. Engaging with rehearsals, the surroundings and the city impinge upon the participants' experiences of hybrid globalisation and localisation. And through their living as theatre activists, they learn to make this engagement explicit in order to perform it on-stage. In addition, with the emphasis on musicality, visibility and physicality, and the juniors' practice of these aspects of theatre, the result is a certain way of engaging with the world. Through the theatre of Nandikar they are forced to relate to their surroundings explicit and critically, as living proofs of an alternative modernity. The practises that constitute their performances are triggered by an urge and struggle to understand, to develop and engage in a reflexive manner. In opposition to many other Kolkata-based groups, the Nandikar activists are not directly interested in making one statement, create one revolution, display one truth, and it is mainly this attitude that constitutes their practises as an example of modernity.

When leaving the theatre hall, they do not leave their identity as Nandikar participants as well. It is rather the contrary, when they engage themselves with the outside world, it is with the help of the images of the performances they have acquired in their search for becoming good persons, and through the ideals of engagement the seniors advocate. Their engagement with the global and the local, with globalisation and localisation, in spheres of art and in the name of theatre, makes an impact on how they engage in general. It is like a never-ending hermeneutic circle, what you bring in with you paves the ground for what you will see. The imaginations and the ideals of engagement the participants acquire through their engagements within Nandikar practises needs to be further explicated.

## **The World of Theatre**

As mentioned before, the juniors say they think about theatre 24 hours a day. They experience theatre as a totality encompassing every part of their life, in the same manner as the family does. When they leave the 47/1 Shyambazaar or a playhouse, they carry with them imaginations and ideals that contribute to new ways of engaging with the surroundings.

The main and most all-encompassing new imagination the juniors acquire is that of being part of a World of Theatre with other performers and activist they never have met, a community engulfing a greater part of the globe and most societies with invisible, but real connections. Every group of theatre performers constitute intersect in this vast web. When the juniors enter the confines of Nandikar's dwelling at 47/1 Shyambazaar Street for the first time, they also enter a scape where global flows of performative practises and theories, literary works and popular images connect them to external forces and imaginations. The site of Nandikar is no longer just a few rooms smelling of perspiration and urine, but a threshold to other parts of Bengal and India, and a step out to a geographically unsituated world. Imagining themselves as part of this community provides the participants with a feeling of belonging to this theatrescape, and this opens up the world for them – they will be at home everywhere where there are other performers. This is how they communicate their experience of the concept World of Theatre and as such it is not necessary true that they would feel at home everywhere.

The experience of belonging to a World of Theatre is as real as anything else. Interestingly this makes other external forces something they are able to relate to, to criticise or celebrate. Further, as members of a global community there are – spatially speaking – nothing that definitely is external to them. To other scapes, like financescapes, the juniors seldom or never feel any belonging and this is what now is external to them. Experiencing themselves as a part of a global scape thus makes spatial relations less important in communicating an identity as theatre activists; in fact the dislocated sensation of their practises of theatre is a primary mark of identity. It is hard not to emphasis this enough, their identity as members of Nandikar and the World of Theatre is mainly with global scapes as such – the World of Theatre, the theatrescapes – and not about specific flows in global scapes. Flows carrying with them plays and performative practises and theories are used to exemplify this experience, but are not in themselves what is experienced as primary to their belonging.

In addition, and apparently contradictory, the Nandikar participants, and especially the juniors, say they are part of a Kolkatan theatre group with its roots firmly planted in the traditions of Kolkata theatre and that Kolkata is the only place that they want to live. Even so, they stress their participations in the global theatrescapes. To them there is not necessarily any contradiction between globalisation and localisation. Kolkata is a place marked by its globality, and so is Nandikar.

## Direct Engagement

In the car after a performance of *Shesh Shaktar* I talk about what would happen, if we continue the story after the play had finished on the stage, in the minister's office the following day, and I add that the sheer thought about it gave me a bad feeling. Sir's reply is fast and short. Thoughts like that, where you think about what happens after "the performance ends" has nothing to do with theatre, he says. With a quote from Tagore he states that "dreaming on is to be a coward, because it is to escape, to seek safety, comfort and the known. Theatre is here and now – only what it shows you during the performance".

This view underlines a central ideal of engagement. The juniors learn to face the present, to let themselves immerse into their surroundings. Like in chapter 7 when the set-artist of Nandikar moves beyond the dichotomy of inside and outside, the juniors must engage directly with their co-performers, the partakers and the physical surroundings. When Jhulan-di, in chapter 4, was forced to re-act her entry until she was on the fringe of an emotional collapse, it was an ideal of engagement where a total commitment to the situation was required. Within Nandikar this ideal is connected to honesty, honesty in the meaning of being open with your own or the character's, the other present persons', and the situation's, emotions. Honesty in this respect is important to many in the search of becoming a *bhaalo maanus*.

In the previous chapter, the immersion into the set of the play *Maramiya Mon* was seen as essential in expressing the emotions of the Ego. The set represents aspect of a person and its emotions. In this respect it is tempting to portray Kolkata not only as a cultural

manifestations, but also as conceptual maps – a cityscape that in its own right provides the engaging inhabitants with imaginations which make other expressions of (globalised) hybridity sensible and meaningful. In order to acquire such strong imaginations a deep and direct engagement is preferable (willingly or un-willingly). New imaginations are not something that usually come oozing in without people knowing it, at least not in theatre. As presented in chapter 3, to be conscious of processes of socialisation, or what Bourdieu called re-culturation (1977), is emphasised within Nandikar.

## **Disclosing Truths**

It does not exist any unambiguous roadmap on how to re-act on stage, no single answer or demarcated truth. Every single situation contains its own truth, every new variation demand a new or re-tuned re-action. On the stage the actors need to witness the performance from above in order to act adequately within it. These are Nandikar's difficult ambitions and ideals. On stage their direct engagement with the other performers and the partakers must be approached with a specific distance, the distance of understanding, interpretation and critique. This ideal is the opposite of recreating something old, something traditional, something rehearsed. Every performance is in this respect something new, and requires actors who have rehearsed how to dwell in(to) the present. Within the limitations of the play as given by the director everything can happen, everything should happen.

Nandikar performances are performances of modernity. They are critical disclosures of conditions of living that Nandikar (seniors) find important to perform and teach. For Nandikar to enter the flows of globalisation resulted not primarily in a political or activist theatre. Through the activists acquired ideals of what constitute good art, it resulted in a desire to display various conditions of living. This attitude of investigation is firmly rooted in Bengali performative traditions as well as in *bideshi* ones, in Bengali practises like *adda* and *global* practises of Theatre-in-Education. As such, Nandikar's performative practises constitute a modern way of reflexive engagement – in itself an alternative modernity. To see themselves as part of relations are what the juniors bring with them when leaving the

playhouse. Seldom is anything good or bad in itself, the context influence the outcome. Their view is that globalisation denotes some forces and flows that constitute us, and others that we should counterattack.

To describe Nandikar's practises as performances of modernity is not something that the activists directly do themselves. But they emphasis that their theatre has to develop together with the society at large in order to be able to disclose its "natures", and to communicate topics or realities that are experienced as relevant to peoples' every day life. This implies everything from entertaining within the idioms of today's media images, to portraying social problems.

## **The Show Must Go On – A Conclusion**

In this thesis I set out to give a description of how globalisation is experienced, and related to, from below. I have presented an examination of a group of theatre activists and their engagement with their city and world. This engagement is primarily defined by their commitment to the living art of theatre. Theatre consists of a set of different but related activities where the performative practises are important, practises inspired from various parts of the world. In addition to this, the informants and myself understand these activities within the city as an engagement with some globalised cultural forces or flows. As a consequence it has been possible to present a sensible and grounded approach to an urban place with people who are channelling the various streams of globalisation that enters into it.

The participants of Nandikar present modern practises of relating to the present. Both their modernity, and the aspects of the present that they engage with, can be characterised through globalisation. While I do not discard an understanding of economy as an important force in processes of globalisation and therefore as an important field of study, to approach globalisation also from below – on the basis of the engagement of common, situated people who are not controlling trans-national corporations, primary consumers of MTV, part of a displaced diaspora, on the move or victims of the interference of global interests –

should be more common. This is necessary in order to actively dispute the assumptions of “populist postmodern theory that ‘everybody’s on the move these days’, or more extravagantly that ‘we are all tourists’” (Bharucha 2000). One does not have to be a detached cosmopolitan to experience globalisation. Nandikar participants are people who also experience globalisation in a wide variety of different ways and that relates to it both actively and passively.

To advocate an approach to globalisation from below is not something new. Appadurrai have in some of his recent writings called for such an approach in order to connect the processes of economical globalisation to grassroots movements trying to be a corrective to these processes (2001). The idea is to let both sides speak, not only the global capital and the nations-states that negotiate the terms of the new world order together with international foras like the World Bank, the UN system, the WTO, NAFTA and GATT. Those who counter-fight the decisions of these foras, or tries to make their voice recognised as part of a globalisation from below must be taken seriously both within academic discourses, and in order to democratise, the flow of knowledge.

Nandikar do not represent a NGO or a TAN (transnational advocacy network) with a global agenda as such. Concerning globalisation, the Nandikar activists primarily want to disclose globalisation as it is experienced as affecting the locality; secondly they want to perform these experiences outside Kolkata. However, when abroad, their main object is to portray a humanism of investigation, parts of this humanism concerns various flows of globalisation. This humanism may be seen as functioning as a globalising force in itself, since it provides others outside their locality with alternative imaginations.

They communicate their agenda within an ideal of making good living art, good theatre. The approach to globalisation that I present is also from below and I provide representations and interpretations of experiences and stands towards globalisation. One of mine initial understandings of Nandikar was that the group and their practises could not, in the same manner as the city where they are situated, be understood and represented without

paying attention to processes of globalisation. I will elaborate this a bit further, before I conclude the discussion of globalisation and modernities, and present my opinions on a grounded anthropology of globalisation.

## **Forces, Connections and Imaginations**

Nandikar provides a field of study that demands awareness of globalisation. In Michael Burawoy's introduction to a collection of essays concerning ethnographical approaches to globalisation, he distinguishes three axes of such a study that explores external forces, connections between sites and imaginations from daily life (2000: 5). These three components can all be the focus of study according to particular experiences of globalisation depending on:

whether people experienced globalization as an external force to be resisted or accommodated, whether people participated in the creation and reproduction of connections that stretched across the world, or whether people mobilized and/or contested imaginations that were of global dimensions (ibid.).

Again Nandikar participants become intriguing; to them there is no *whether*. As described, they display all these three ways of experiencing globalisation. A majority of their plays is motivated by experiences of external forces, like capitalistic consumerism, which threaten their local values. Through their adaptations, their *shopping* – not as consumption of pleasure (Appadurai 1996: 83), but out of necessity – of different theoretical views and performative practises, their work with other activists from other states or nations, and performances and workshops abroad, Nandikar participate in the creation and reproduction of connections that stretch across the world. Thus, the activists are themselves a force of globalisation. And finally, through their connections across the world, the participants utilise imaginations of global dimensions; they are part of the World of Theatre, they know their Shakespeare and Brecht, and use their work in order to disclose some conditions of societal man.

All of the four plays that I have presented are connected to a statement about space erosion in the wake of consumerism. The forces of global economy are experienced as a threat and



Nandikar activists face and disclose this threat through practises that are experienced as globally used. From Stanislavski and Brecht, to Shakespeare and Miller – the participants take advantage of those theories, practises and texts they mean may contribute in their quest for portraying their experiences of reality. This duality is what constitutes much of Nandikar theatre. To emphasis either their experience of external forces, their participations in the creation or reproduction of global connections, or their use of imaginations of a global dimension would fail to pinpoint this and the hybridity of globalisation. Globalisation denotes both processes Nandikar plays a part in and something they experience as a threat, globalisation provides them with performative practises and makes them single out their own indigenous practises, globalisation gives them imaginations of being exterminated as a group of located individuals and of belonging to a World of Theatre.

The theatre group, the rehearsals, the city and the performances display a multitude of coinciding and diverging practises of, spatially and historically speaking, many different origins. It is this complexity that defines globalisation.

## **Globalisation and Modernities**

In chapter 2 I presented three frames I found necessary in order to disclose the aspects of globalisation and modernity concerning the group and field. In the presentation of the globalisation frame the relations between globalisation and modernity were important. Let me recapitulate this relation.

In opposition to Chakrabarty's representation of *adda* (2001), the different plays of Nandikar constitute different modernities. From *Kabya* to *Football*, the different performative practises they are constituted by, and which I have sought to represent, disclose variations in modernity in how they relate to globalisation. The primary definition of modernity follows Gaonkar who defined modernity as a practise (attitude) of questioning the present, and how this practise actually is manifested in social life varies a lot. This implies a site-based approach to modernity and the acceptance of discussing it in

plural as modernities. The plays of Nandikar express this attitude in different fashions. *Kabya* uses both the composite style of acting and the storyline in order to questioning the present, while in *Shanu* it is mainly the Bengal situated story told which questions the norms of society. In *Football* the modern practise is embedded in the effort to create an alternative to the mixed and seducing media of cable TV and perhaps commercials, and *Football* and *Maramiya Mon* use language to both stress external flows as well as creating a site for theatre within the riverbed of these flows. Even when approaching modernity, as it is practised and situated, the variety of its manifestation is many, and perhaps this should be added to the primary definition. Discrepancy concerning its manifestations seems to be an additional characteristic of modernity. In fact the playhouses as such might be the only sites that unites these different and sometimes diverging modernities.

For the Nandikar juniors a strong attachment to places like 47/1 Shyambazaar Street, the Academy and Kolkata exist at the same time as they identify with global currents and a global scape. When the approach to the experiences of globalisation and the practises of modernity is site based, the representations often result in alternatives to what is given as the abstracted realities within the social science and the humanities.

## **A Grounded Anthropology of Globalisation**

In the introduction of this thesis I proposed a grounded social anthropology of globalisation. I use the word grounded to stress globalisation, as it is sensed, experienced, ascribed meaning and engaged with by ordinary and situated people. The activities of Nandikar provided a field that made it possible to bring social life into a discussion about globalisation. Focusing on social interaction within theatre and how the participants describe their practises I have shown how they are connected in different manners to flows of performative traditions and plays in a global scape of theatre. Nandikar represents a creative and active group that opposes a view of globalisation as purely a one-way project of homogenisation with the West in hegemonic control. Nandikar theatre serves as a site for performative practises of ceaseless struggles to make globalisation comfortable for oneself, to find sense of community in it (Gaonkar 2001: 21). This is an interminable

process of questioning the present, as it is perceived and imagined from both the site of Kolkata and the World of Theatre. This process constitutes a site-based modernity.

Theatre has been in this thesis investigated in order to say something about globalisation and modernity. Globalisation as a paradigm, as an important or key concept in attempts to understand, represent and interpret the social life or life-worlds, must be detached from temporal and eurocentric concepts of modernity and post-modernity. If not, globalisation becomes a word denoting global processes defined on the basis of a socio-historical chain of development with the West as the ideal type. Different processes of globalisation were experienced in Kolkata a long time before it was possible to establish the existence of a modernity. While contemporary globalisation may be described as an intensification of hybridity (Pieterse 1995), with reference to the time/space compression of social relations (Harvey 1990; Giddens 1990, 1991) and the increasing occurrence of disjunctures between different scapes (Appadurai 1996, 2001), the way it is experienced, counter-attacked and also produced from below represents a wide variety of adaptations.

Theatre is at once very local and very much part of a global practise. Locality has for long been the hallmark of much anthropology, but most sites are today connected to other sites on a global basis. Not being able, or interested in, to focus on global connections – which a group like Nandikar is a junction within and where global flows passes through – makes it impossible to give grounded representations of them. And by not using theoretical statements of globalisation would make it hard to interpret the representations. Nandikar activists are somewhat extreme as an example of how situated people constitute intersects in global flows, but nevertheless they represent a recognised and established group within the society. This view is mainly corresponding with Georg E. Marcus' urge for “an ethnography that while it encompass local conditions, is aimed at representing system or pieces of system” (1998: 51). More often than not, globalisation as experienced from below is portrayed as it creates victims; globalisation is represented in connection to displaced fugitives and relocated diasporas, decisions made far away that limit and shape peoples possibility to determine their own life and as an undemocratic force that makes the

majority of the world's inhabitants economically, socially or culturally deprived. As described in this thesis, this is not always the case.

While the Nandikar activists explain the problem of theatre to attract huge crowds and be an important force in the society, with reference to globalisation in the name of popular media and consumerism, yet they more importantly represent globalisation also as a resource. Their fight is done within a few flows of globalisation in order to create sites from where they may understand, disclose and perhaps change – in short to control their position within a world where the intensified hybridity of globalisation continues to make everything more complex. And this struggle is a never-ending performance.

## Appendix – A Few Bengali words

|                 |   |                    |  |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|--|
| <i>Antahpur</i> | Private quarters (for females); see <i>purdha</i> .   | <i>Haat</i>        | Local (village) market, periodic.  |
| <i>Baajaar</i>  | Bazaar  | <i>Naataak</i>     | Drama; theatre; play.  |
| <i>Bidesh</i>   | Foreign. According to context it can be foreign to either Bengal or India.                    | <i>Maya</i>        | The Goddess of Illusion or the veil of illusion.   |
| <i>Caa</i>      | Tea. Usually with milk, sometimes with lemon or spices.                                       | <i>Mohila</i>      | (Married) woman  |
| <i>Dada</i>     | Denotes older brother, also used to address older male acquaintance or friend                 | <i>Muri</i>        | Roasted rice.  |
| <i>-da</i>      | Post-fix is added to the name of older brother, male acquaintance or friend (e.g. Debbo-da)   | <i>Paan</i>        | Betel nut and leaves with lime and ashes, often with tobacco and spices.   |
| <i>Deva</i>     | God   | <i>Purdha</i>      | Literally denoting the screen that separates the men and women in common areas of the Persian household. Refers to the system of keeping the females of the household separate from the public |
| <i>Devi</i>     | Goddess   | <i>Raaksaa</i>     | Demon  |
| <i>Didi</i>     | Denotes older sister, also used to address older female acquaintance or friend                | <i>Ras</i>         | Flavour; or the sap that delivers the flavour.   |
| <i>-di</i>      | Post-fix is added to the name of older sister, female acquaintance or friend (e.g. Jhulan-di) | <i>Sugrihini</i>   | A good housewife   |
|                 |   | <i>Sumata</i>      | A good mother  |
|                 |   | <i>Suti-pratha</i> | Widow burning  |
|                 |   | <i>Thaanaa</i>     | Police district  |

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## Summary

In this thesis I give a description of how globalisation is experienced, and related to, from below. I present a group of theatre activists from the troupe Nandikar, and their engagement with Kolkata (Calcutta, India) and a World of Theatre. The theatre of Nandikar consists of a set of practises that originated from various parts of the world; hence globalisation becomes an important framework for interpretation.

I follow Nandikar from their office and rehearsal room in North Kolkata to the stage in Central Kolkata. Through this journey I mainly investigate their rehearsal practises, the city where they live and their performances. Concerning their rehearsals, I pay attention to how they utilise performative practises, texts and theories that can be seen as part of a World of Theatre that they share with other theatre groups world wide. Their imagination of being part of this *theatrescape* is seen as central to their identity. Kolkata is discussed in order to contextualise the group in space and time. The urban site of Kolkata, with an emphasis on its bazaars, is seen as a conceptual map or image of globalisation as hybridisation. Entering the stage with Nandikar makes it possible to approach their way of disclosing their engagement with a globalised world. It is important to show how globalisation is a topic in various ways in the four plays presented, at the same timer as the performances may be seen as entering flows of globalisation themselves.

The activists understand these practises as an engagement with some global flows of performative traditions and theatre plays. As a consequence, it has been possible to present a grounded approach to an urban place with people who are channelling the various streams of globalisation. This is a study of globalisation as it is experienced and lived out. Their position is described as constituting an alternative modernity, following a definition of modernity as a site-based attitude of questioning the present.

Through out the thesis I argue for an understanding of globalisation as constituted by flows of information and practises, others than those connected to economy. Even as they see aspects of globalisation as a threat, they also see it as a potential. I conclude in my study that Nandikar activists are both subjected to globalisation, at the same time as they are agents of globalisation. This duality is central in my findings.