

RICHARD SCHECHNER'S NOTEBOOK 42

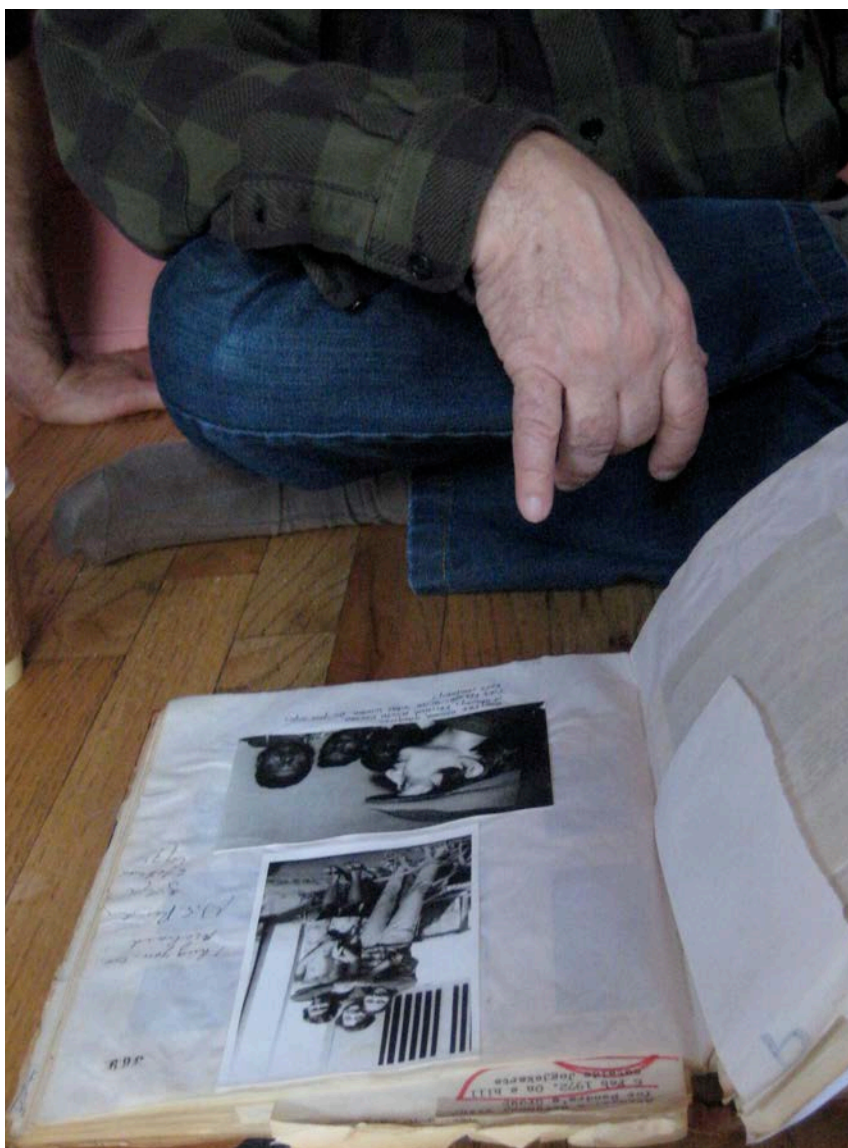
DANIEL DALE

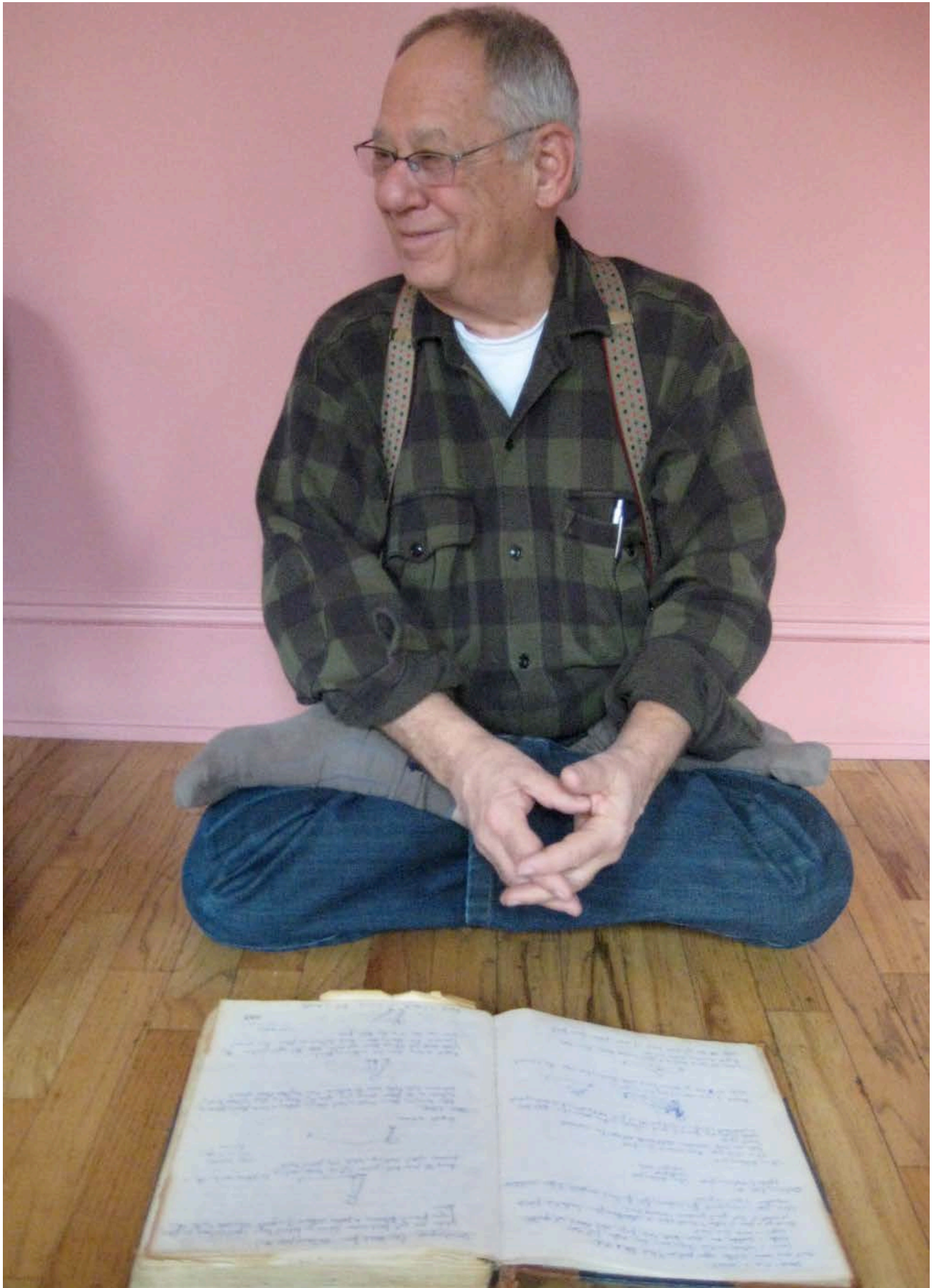
PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDDIE STERN

IT WAS IN THE SPRING OF 2009. I HAD just finished teaching a yoga class at a health club in Manhattan, when a man who had been waiting by the door entered and began to do his own practice. I immediately took note of his uncommon form. He was moving and breathing just as I had seen demonstrated by Srivatsa Ramaswami and A.G. Mohan, two notable students of Krishnamacharya's. I begged the man's pardon for interrupting, but asked if he wouldn't mind my asking where he had learned to practice in such a way.

"I learned in Madras, back in the 70s," he said. "May I ask, from whom?" I inquired, to which he replied, "You probably haven't heard of him." I believe I then said, "Try me." I was soon glad I had persisted; much to my delight, he said he had studied with "a man named Krishnamacharya."

In the brief conversation that ensued, we introduced ourselves, and I learned that his name was Richard Schechner and he was a professor at NYU. I was completely unaware at the time of what an important figure he is in the theatre world, and he was quite humble and unassuming. I expressed my great interest in learning about his studies with Krishnamacharya, and asked if he might consider giving a presentation to a class that I was attending weekly. I





and a group of fellow yoga teachers were studying anatomy and yoga with Leslie Kaminoff—whom, I pointed out, was a student of Krishnamacharya’s son, T.K.V. Desikachar.

Richard said he might be able to do that, but was about to travel abroad for several months. He gave me his email address, and we maintained an email correspondence. Reprinted with his permission, here is the body of an email dated September 12, 2009:

DEAR DANIEL,

Nice hearing from you. I would be glad to participate in a discussion with both groups. And I would very much like to see what you do at your center.

But I have my doubts about whether or not my “knowledge” will be of use to you. Yes, I studied on a daily basis with Sri Krishnamacharya—but it was very practical stuff, and it was in 1971, 38 years ago. I have a notebook with his instructions to me. I have memories of working with him. These are very simple. We would meet at his home (I presume) near to the Kalekshetra Dance Academy in Madras (now Chennai). He would demonstrate an asana, and I would do it. He would then dictate the breathing and the pose to me. I would write it down and repeat. Each day, I believe (I am not sure of this) I would repeat what I had learned the day before and Krishnamacharya would add. This went on for a mere 4 weeks—my notebook will reveal exactly how long.

And that’s all. I had no contact with Krishnamacharya after 1971. What I learned from him changed/sustained my life ... though I didn’t always behave with that knowledge in my heart. It is in my heart now.

I maintained the practice faithfully for about 5-8 years. Then I let it slip to some degree, practicing just occasionally on my own but always faithfully whenever I led a performance workshop, which was mostly in the summers from the early 1990s to about 2000. Then I resumed the practice in a faithful way in 2008, a year after a heart valve replacement and in preparation for a performance workshop I was going to be filmed

teaching this past summer, 2009.

Whether or not sharing this rather brief, anecdotal information with you and your colleagues is of any value ... I don’t know. That is for you, not me, to determine.

If, after what I have told you, you still want me to visit your center, I will. We will work out a time in November. I am not in NY early in November. I return to NY about November 15. I would love to spend one afternoon with you and see your work.

best,

RS

ON NOVEMBER 11, RICHARD visited The Breathing Project. For about 2 hours, he held us all mesmerized as he read and commented upon his vivid and detailed notes from his private lessons with T. Krishnamacharya. Fortuitously, Eddie Stern was among those present, and so the foundations were laid for the present article.

I introduced our guest to the class, and told briefly about how we had met at the health club. I introduced him as Dr. Schechner and he asked that we call him Richard. After his presentation, I believe we all regretted not having made arrangements to record it. However, I did take extensive notes. What follows is a synopsis.

WITH VERY LITTLE INTRODUCTION, Richard began simply by reading from a rather large and heavy leather-bound notebook. He said that this book covered his travels in India in 1971, and had many personal details. In the back section of the notebook were notes he had taken and drawings he had made during his his studies with Krishnamacharya. We soon learned what a meticulous and prodigious keeper of notes Richard is. By that point, 38 years ago, he had already amassed a voluminous collection; this book was number 42. Richard said he now has some 80,000+ pages which will, along with his books and letters, be bequeathed to the library at Princeton University as part of the “Richard Schechner Papers”.

In his first few lessons with “K” (as he

told us he had denoted Krishnamacharya in his notes), Richard was struggling, sweating, shaking. As Richard sat next to Leslie while he read to the class from his notebook, Leslie was able to see his drawings of the postures K had taught him. Leslie pointed out that from both these and the way Richard described how K was teaching him, it seemed that K had deemed him capable and fit to quickly go deep into a level of practice that K did not teach to most students. There were several forms of mahamudra.

K taught him in an English which sounded very clear yet very terse, as when he had Richard hold a pose and told him something like, “Keep mind fixed on the god.” Richard’s notebook includes lucid descriptions of Krishnamacharya’s instructions and other remarks, as well as Richard’s experiences doing the practice during and after lessons with K.

Richard said he is an atheist Hindu Jew Buddhist, not very religious but very interested in ritual. But he emphasized that he is not part one and part the other, but “100% of each—400%!” As for the atheist part, he said he is a regular reader of Science and also has an interest in Indian nondualist philosophy, advaita vedanta, which, he pointed out, is not atheistic per se but often described in the West as monist. And, he said, “I am culturally very Jewish, observing key Jewish holidays and attending a Reform synagogue regularly.”

Richard said that since 1971 he has rarely opened this notebook to look at these notes, although he has been practicing since then and feels he is rather faithful to all that he learned. He said, though, that he is a firm believer in process, so that if there are things that have changed, he doesn’t have a problem with that. “I know there are a few asanas I do not practice. And I inhale/exhale always moving on exhalation—and maybe Krishnamacharya taught me some variation.”

When he studied with K in Madras (Chennai), it was just for about 4 weeks. He would go to K’s house in Madras, 4 or 5 times a week, and they would work in a private room for more than an hour

From beginning of Nov. First notice
about 10, my page form

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USEFI, MADRAS: 22, Vijaya Raghavachari Road, MADRAS-17.

Phone: 43208

Mr. Krishnamachari

10 B, 4th Cross Street ^{~~72416~~} (School
Road)

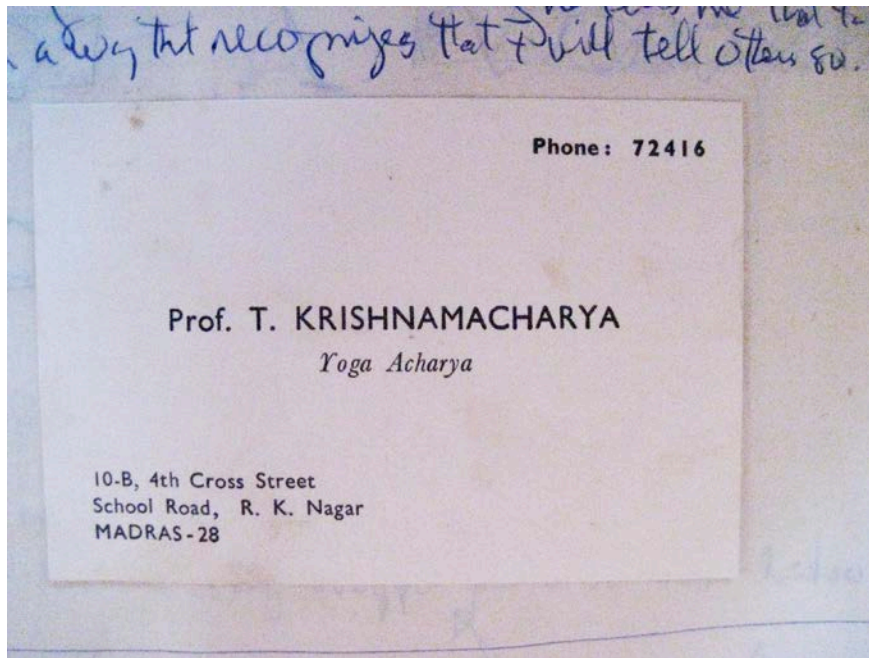
Ramakrishna Nagar

Opp. Multia Chetty School

Madras-28.

(Green Color house)

Telephone: 72416



at a time. K said this was the first part in a full course of study that would comprise 7 stages. At the end of these 4 weeks of study, when Richard was about to leave Madras, K invited him to return to India again to continue to the second course, and Richard said he told K he'd be back. "That's what they all say," K responded (to paraphrase). In the end, Richard did not return. But Richard said that to his surprise, even after just a month's study, K told him he could teach others what he had learned. However, he said that it should be taught one on one, or at the most he should teach two at a time.

Richard originally traveled to Madras because of his interest in Bharatanatyam and other kinds of Indian classical dance, which had led him to the Kalakshetra Dance Academy. While there, he asked for a recommendation for a yoga teacher, and they sent him to K, whose house was close by. He also had a letter from the Fulbright people in India recommending him to K.

Richard said that at the time, he was overweight. His "big belly" was a challenge in asana practice. "My belly has always been my adversary," Richard said. "Less today, but still not perfect. Never perfect." K assured him that if he did regular practice, he would lose it in a matter of weeks. He told Richard of other students of his who had lost their bellies very fast. "I never got rid of it

altogether," Richard said, "but I soon developed muscles under the fat, and my solar-plexus is strong now; it supports me. And my practice of pranayama permanently changed the way I breathe. That is a big plus."

AS RICHARD READ THROUGH HIS notebook, we got many glimpses into Krishnamacharya's teaching and methodology. For example, when K asked him to lie down on his back, Richard asked if he could show his teacher the way he was used to lying. Richard demonstrated for us what he had shown K. Looking, at 75, as spritely as a man half his age, Richard swiftly sprang from his seat and went on his back, into a supine position with his knees bent, the soles of his feet on the floor and arms crossed with hands on opposite shoulders. Richard said that when he asked K if this was an acceptable way of lying down, K said no, he should lie on his back, legs extended and arms at his side. Furthermore, K told him not to lie with palms up or legs wide apart, which he said was not good. He instead had him lie with palms down and feet together (as in tadaka mudra), which he said was better for the blood flow.

Richard said K's teaching methodology consisted of 4 steps. First, he would

demonstrate. Then he would dictate the steps verbally and Richard would take notes and/or draw a picture. Then K had Richard do it while he dictated the steps. Lastly, Richard would do it on his own and K would watch without dictating.

K instructed him to keep the breaths long and smooth, with "hiss like cobra, in pit of throat, down by collarbones." He also told Richard he should "keep the currents in the body" for at least 60 days. Richard said he sensed K was referring to "bodily fluids." K said to practice for only 45 minutes to an hour; longer was not good for the organs. K also told Richard while he still had the belly, he should move on the exhale. When he had lost the belly, he could try moving on inhales. Richard said he did lose the belly, but has tried both and has always preferred moving on exhales.

Richard asked K early on (1st meeting) what yoga was. K laughed and said they could get to that next time. Richard said he kept asking K, and eventually K gave him a vedantic interpretation: union of the soul with God.

K gave some bits of dietary advice as well: No onions, no eggs, & as little meat as possible. Also, more wheat, less rice.

Very shortly after commencing studies with K, Richard began to feel very strongly that he had found his guru. He wished to express this to K but never did, because in those days everybody said they had a guru—like the Beatles—and he felt that the word guru had been cheapened, debased.

K referred to himself as an acharya and most people called him Professor. Richard showed us K's business card and a photo he had given him. On the card was the title of acharya.

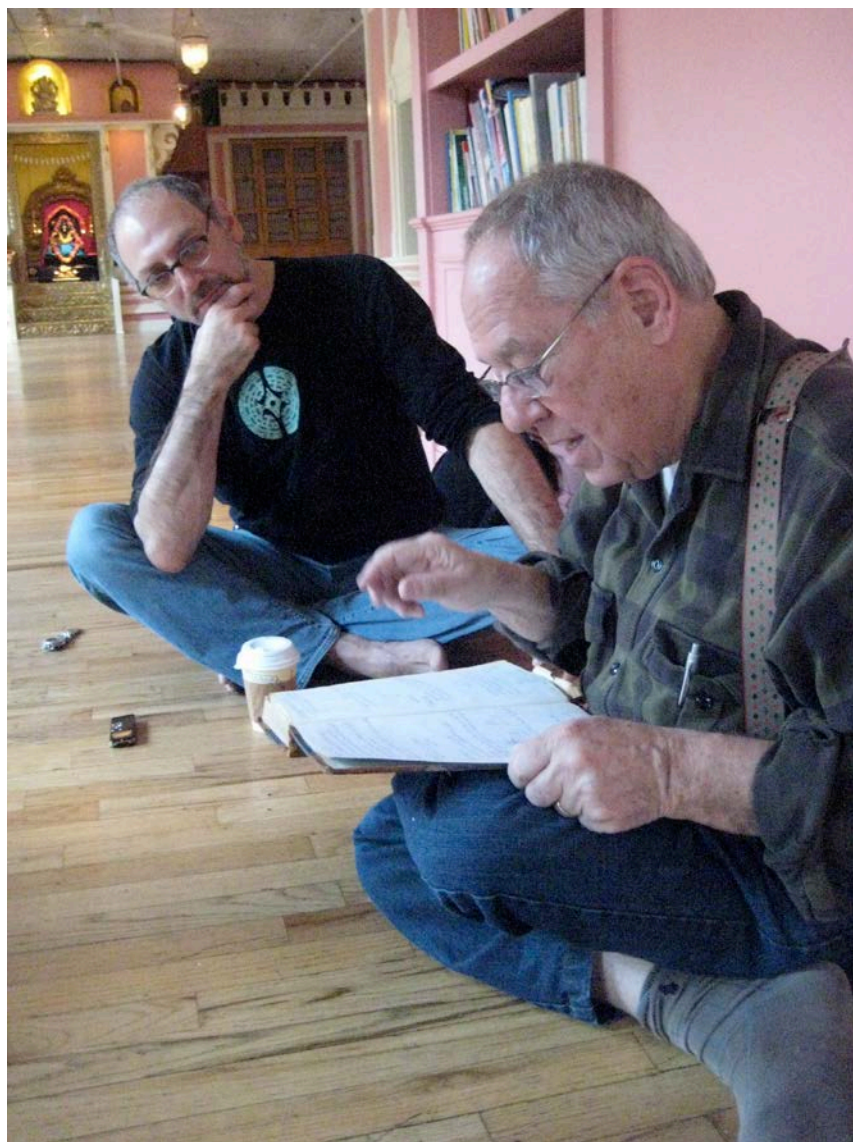
RICHARD SAYS HE GETS UP AT 4:30 in the morning to do his practice. Or he does it at the health club after completing other exercises, especially the cross-trainer. Even today, his yoga practice lasts from 45 minutes to an hour. In 1971, K was in his eighties, and told Richard that he got up at 2:30am to do his prayers, studies, etc. This was the best time, K said-- quiet and free of distractions.

Richard is now himself in his mid-seventies. Sitting in full padmasana for some of the time he spoke with us, he said he still does all the asanas that he remembers having been taught by K, including multiple variations of headstand. When asked if he had ever injured himself, he said never. He sounded surprised by the question, and said that he always makes great effort to remain fully present, listen closely to his body, and not push. “Sometimes, if I feel I have too much weight in my belly, I do the shoulder stand but not the headstand, because I don’t want to injure my neck.”

He also said that he remains ready to hold his attention and stay still, when, on occasion, the indescribable moments arise— where it is as if, in reaching for the horizon, suddenly you are able to reach it, to be there, to be everywhere at once. Like dreaming but not asleep. He said dream states were special because the mind moves freely, as close as possible to being “unedited.” In waking consciousness, he said, we are always editing.

Richard told us he does not consider himself a yoga expert or yoga teacher. His life is in the theatre but his short time with K changed his life and the way he works. For years, he has been sharing what K taught him, with performers. He often leads long workshops, and the asanas and breathing exercises are part of a larger program incorporating many different elements, such as vocal work he learned from Kristin Linklater and vocal and “association” exercises he learned from Jerzy Grotowski and Ryszard Cieslak. He worked with Grotowski and Cieslak in 1967, before going to India. Grotowski had made trips to India and other parts of Asia and was much influenced by Asian thought and practice. (Richard gave a brief and very impressive demonstration of some vocal exercises, using four types of resonance moving from the gut up to the crown of the head and back down again.)

He made an aside referring to what he calls “deep Twitter,” which sparked an interesting conversation about social



networks. Richard essentially said the real lasting effects an individual can have are about going vertical rather than horizontal; it is not as important how many are reached, but whom you connect with. Some people are “nodes.” Reaching just a few of them, your message may make a lasting impression, while many people who are a hugely popular in their day, soon become unknowns. This way, in a lineage tradition such as has been maintained by the yogis, knowledge can be passed, largely intact and undiluted, over long periods of time.

Richard then shared some stories about close friends from the theatre world, like the late greats Spalding Gray and Grotowski, and told us about his 2009 work as director of Lian Amarís’s

solo performance, *Swimming to Spalding*.

Afterwards, Leslie gave Richard a copy of a book by Desikachar that he had played a role in getting published (*Health Healing and Beyond: Yoga and The Living Tradition of Krishnamacharya*). Eddie gave Richard a copy of an issue of *Namarupa*, and he and Leslie spoke with Richard about the possibility of him being the subject of an article.

ON DECEMBER 11, 2009, Richard met with me, Leslie, and Eddie, at Ashtanga Yoga New York & Sri Ganesha Temple on Broome Street in SoHo. What follows is the transcription from the audio recording.

Leslie: So, you said you hadn't gone back into this journal, not for a while.

Richard: I hadn't gone into this until right now. One of these days, I'm going to take my journals and make a book. But this is journal 42.

Leslie: What are you up to now?

Richard: Somewhere in the 80s or 90s, and these are more complete than the later ones because once the computer came in... I keep a lot of notes in the computer.

Leslie: I was looking over your shoulder [when you gave the talk at The Breathing Project], so I saw the drawings you did of the practice you did.

Richard: Well, the thing is, when you want to do this interview or whatever, if you want to photograph some of the drawings, that would be very good and I could read from this journal. I think the journal is more reliable than I am. And the reason I keep journals is because of that, because memory is always a barnacle on experience, it accretes extra things. But the journal didn't have time to accrete the future, so this is the 9th of November, 8:30AM, 1971. Yoga instructions.

Leslie: Now, you turned the book upside-down to have a whole fresh start; it's a separate section [points to how the yoga notes begin in the back of the leather-bound volume, and are inverted].

Richard: Yes, but I call it, at the beginning— this is very interesting—the back-front. [Reads from notebook] “13 November. Such a notebook as this has scarcely existed before.” So, the first 41 notebooks are kind of ordinary. [laughter] “I am careful about taking it to places and keeping it dry. In its back-front,” — you see?— “are the notes of my yoga...” So, where do you want to begin? What do you want to do?

Eddie: Shall we begin at the beginning?

Richard: I don't know where the beginning is.

Eddie: Should we start with when and why you were in India, and how you met Krishnamacharya?

Richard: Well, I was in India because four blocks from here is the Performing Garage, in which a theatre I founded, The Performance Group and now its successor The Wooster Group, perform. In June 1968 we opened a play, Dionysus in 69 at 33 Wooster Street. It was a very successful version of Euripides' The Bacchae. After one of the performances, in the winter of 1968, a very formally dressed man came up to me. I thought he would criticize the production because he looked staid. But instead he said, “Oh, I liked it very much. It shows all your Asian influence. You must have been to Asia.” And I said, “No, as a matter of fact, I've never been to Asia.” He said, “Well, you must go.” And, being an arrogant 34-year-old, I said, “You must send me.” Immediately he took out his card and he said, “Okay, I will.” This man was Porter McCray, the head of what was then called the JDRIII Fund, the John D. Rockefeller III Fund, which is now the Asian Cultural Council. And so, I called him, of course. He was as good as his word. He said the JDRIII Fund would send me to Asia. I said, “I don't like to travel alone, would you send Joan McIntosh with me, we're living together?” Joan was a leading actress in The Performance Group. He said, “Sure.” “Where?” I said. He said, “Anywhere you want to go, for as long as you want to stay.” Now, those were the days foundations, at least the JDRIII Fund, were very— there was no application, there was no nothing. Just call the travel agent and make the reservations. I knew I wanted to spend a relatively lot of time in India, and after that the rest of Asia. Relatively a lot of time meant, 4 months. The whole trip was about 8-9 months. That was my first time to India.

Leslie: It was in '68?

Richard: No, I finally made the trip

in 1971. He met me in, probably, '68, during the run of Dionysus. We opened it in June '68. He probably saw it in the winter of '68-69. We ran it for a year. By the time I got everything settled, because I was running this theatre—you know Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group, those people?

Leslie: This is theatre history we're talking here.

Richard: Right. Liz was my assistant. She's still there now as the artistic director of The Wooster Group. After Dionysus and Macbeth we were doing a play about American history, Vietnam, and Charles Manson – a play we wrote collectively, Commune. Before I could leave for a big chunk of time I had to arrange for the future of The Performance Group. We were going to go on tour to France and Poland in 1971. I asked Liz to fill in for me as director of Commune, and I found a replacement for Joan in the production. So immediately after performing in Poland, Joan and I left for India. Making all these arrangements took time. So it was not until the fall of '71 that we went. Our plane landed in New Delhi and after a few days we took off for Calcutta (Kolkata now). But after about two or three weeks in the north— I would return to the north— I went to what is now Chennai, what was then Madras. North India – Calcutta especially – was crowded, complex beyond belief, with contending political and social activists, a great deal of modern and traditional theatre and dance. Intense. No doubt I was in culture shock. Madras was very different. Joan and I lived in a quiet part of the city, Shastrinagar. We were paying guests in a very nice middle-class home. Joan studied dance and I began my yoga studies. That was a large part of my goal in going to Madras, to study yoga. I had two goals, one to observe bharatanatyam practice and even more important for me, training. At that time I was editor of TDR. I am editor again now, after not being editor for some years. TDR is a leading performance studies and theatre journal. Also, as I said before, I knew Jerzy Grotowski whose “poor

theatre” work had shaken up the Western theatre world. I knew he was influenced by kathakali and Indian performance as well as by Chinese performances. So, I wanted to do research on Grotowski’s presence in India. I later found his traces in Kerala, at the Kathakali Kalamandalam [school]. So, you see, I was both a scholar and a director. Still am. Kalakshetra was a school for training in classical Indian dance—bharatanatyam and kuchipudi. I think I got to Madras in the middle of October 1971. This [where the journal entries on yoga begin] is the 9th of November. I realized Madras was a big center for yoga and so, I just simply asked, “Who would be a good person to study with?” You saw that letter, right, where they recommended Krishnamacharya, from the Fullbright people, the United States Educational Foundation in India. And although I wasn’t a Fullbright grantee, I was from the JDR III fund, they worked closely together. So, it was through them, and maybe some people at Kalakshetra too— I don’t remember who— that I got introduced to Krishnamacharya. I went to meet him. He interviewed the people who wanted to study with him. Joan went with me. We talked with K. I don’t know how he interviewed others. With me, he met me, he asked a few questions such as why did I want to study yoga, he looked me over with his very wide but gentle eyes. After not very long, he said he would accept me as a student. I had no idea who he was, beyond a yoga teacher. I didn’t know then that he was the yoga teacher, the great Krishnamacharya. He was simply a teacher I found by asking. He was the teacher people sent me to. Things often work in the most simple ways.

Leslie: Were you aware at the time of the connection between him and Rukmini Devi [founder of Kalakshetra]?

Richard: No, not at all. In fact, I am not aware of it even now; I know who she is but I didn’t know they were connected. I need to look into that. It’s always possible to learn something big, just like that, at the drop of a hat or, in this case, of a name. So, maybe

it was through Kalakshetra that I got to K. It could be, because I was a visiting scholar there, so they knew me there. I watched their classes, so probably that’s why I was sent to him because it would be at Kalakshetra that I would have asked where could I study yoga. That and Fulbright. A coincidence of forces. But in a certain sense, I am glad that Krishnamacharya didn’t come with any fabulous pedigree. I met him directly, as a young man, more or less young, interested in the practice. And I think if I had thought of him as quote great, it would have affected me. After all, I was 37 years old, I was not in the best of shape. I mean, I was healthy but I had no psycho-physical practice. I mean, I had some stuff that I learned from Grotowski. But I didn’t practice the Grotowski work on a daily basis. Do you know much about Grotowski?

Leslie: Well, not in detail, I just know his reputation as one of these luminaries in the theatre world.

Richard: Right. Well, he and I were friends. I was the first one to introduce his work into the American theatre. That was in 1963 when I was living in New Orleans, teaching at Tulane University, end editing the Tulane Drama Review (that later became The Drama Review when it and I moved to NYU in 1967). That’s a whole other story. Grotowski finally came to the United States for the first time in 1967. He brought the great actor Ryszard Cieslak with him. Together they did a workshop at NYU partly under TDR’s sponsorship. I was a member of that workshop. And the exercises that I learned with Grotowski, many of which are yoga-inflected, I passed on to the people that became The Performance Proup, at the Performing Garage at 33 Wooster Street in SoHo. And so, it loops around in that way.

So [pointing to his first drawing in his notes from his first meeting with Krishnamacharya] that’s how I began on the 9th of November, 1971. K started me with dandasana, the stick pose. He always would give English names and Sanskrit names and the way he would teach would be to tell me about it, to

demonstrate it himself, then have me do it with him talking me through it, and then allow me the time to do this [drawing]. It was good for me to write out the asanas and draw the poses because I used these instructions and drawings when I got home. It was not until later that I was able to practice from memory.

Leslie: These notes and drawings were made in the midst of the session.

Richard: In the midst of the session. And then I used these to do my practice because I was starting only 2 times a week and then it was 3 times a week, but I was I was practicing once a day at least, sometimes twice a day. The only way to confirm exactly how frequently I studied face-to-face with Krishnamacharya is to verify the dates that I wrote down in the notebook.

Leslie: I’m curious about the method of documenting them with stick figures. Was that something that you—?

Richard: That’s me.

Leslie: That’s all you?

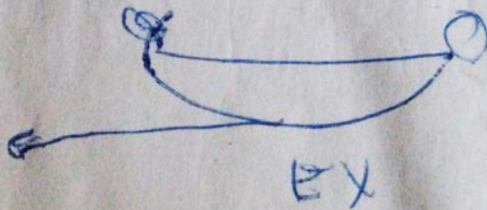
Richard: Yes, because I was just drawing. And I needed to draw fairly swiftly. I didn’t want to use up all my face time with my teacher by drawing and writing. I wanted to practice. The drawings are mine, but the words are his, in his own very particular way of speaking English: “Sit on soft mat, face east, pray God. Stretch both legs forward. Toes, heels, knees together. Do not bend knees, while with hissing sound in throat pit, go over head both arms, turning palms up.”

Leslie: Were you able to get that hissing sound right away?

Richard: Yeah, it was very easy because I was doing vocal work, with The Performance Group, from Grotowski. When I said I was untrained, that probably was wrong, but I’m trained in theatre and I did with Grotowski what later I found out was pranayama but I didn’t know what I was doing was

Bow Posture

lay face down, palms face up.
While EX knee bend slowly hold ankles



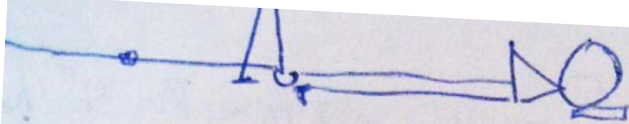
IN Down.

then put palms in MIDDLE BALL

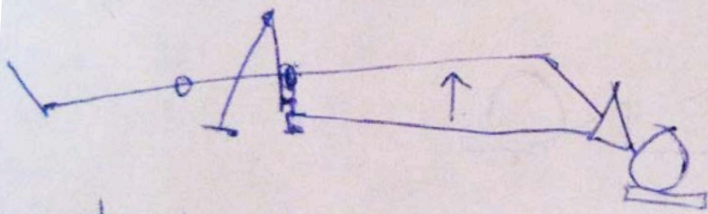
BALL SALUTE

- o overhead palms forward
- x stretch up as at end of locust pos
- o long jump up.

IN



make trunk like arch, press down w/ arms
head to toe while lifting. Keep stretch



Keep palms
on floor

press trunk. Suck in tummy
w/ or force.

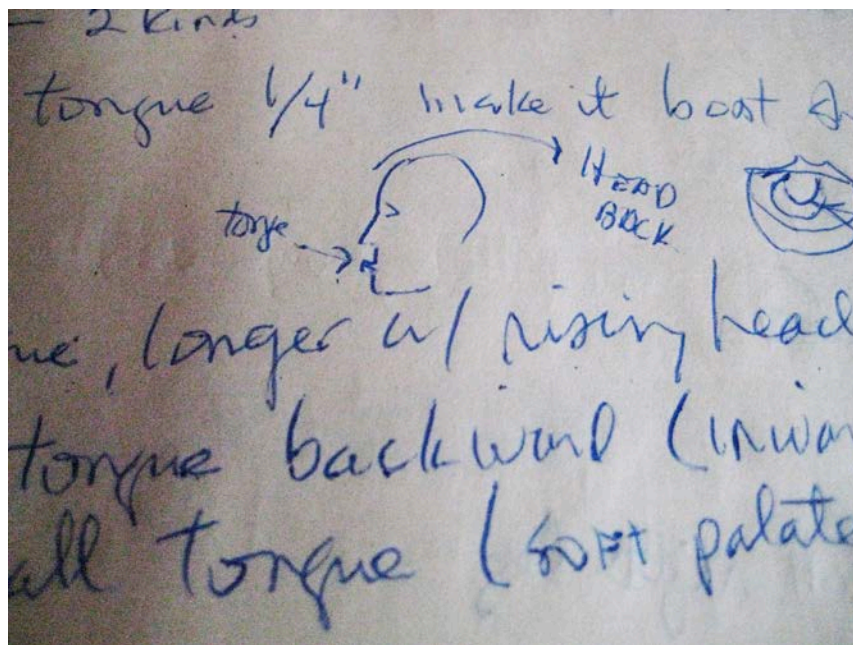
pranayama. And resonators, Grotowski was very big on: Hooohoo, hmhmhm, hahaha, huhuhuh. And the relationship between these resonators. And the forced breathing. But then the deer mouth breathing, I learned later. So, there was already yoga in what I was doing at the theatre, but I didn't know it.

Leslie: So, to make that hissing sound, you had a reference for that; it was something you had already learned and practiced.

Richard: Yes, and I use it all the time when I train people now, in the theatre, because it's good exercise for the diaphragm—the resistance strengthens... There were other things. My theatre training is different. It integrates this, but it is also different from this. But then, for example, "Interlock fingers, turn hands upwards, tight fingers, straight elbows. If possible, shoulders joined with ears. Erect spine. "Chin down between two collar bones. Eyes and mouth closed," I mean, I can hear him saying these things.

Leslie: This is not modified instruction. He's giving you absolute, classical form of this pose.

Richard: I am glad to know that. I didn't know that then. I never read a book on yoga. Even today I know that Iyernagar's *Light on Yoga* is Krishnamacharya's system. But I have never read *Light on Yoga*. I don't want to read it. I have K inside me. That's the best path for me. And when I was his student in Madras, K did not ask me to read a book or anything. What is here in the notebooks is what he is saying, this is what I am writing, and then I draw these. Now, whether or not he looked at these drawings—he must have, because I was drawing them right there, in front of him—as best I know, he never corrected me in the drawings. And then, finally: "Expand chest, spread shoulders, chin down against chest. Keep chin like log"—I like that one—"Repeat 6 exhalations, inhalations with hissing sound. Lie down flat, rest 1 minute." Now, he did



make a distinction about inhaling and exhaling. Because I was a "big belly" I had to make all of my movements on exhale, and if I got to be a "little belly," I could make my movements on inhale. I'm still, thirty-eight years later, hoping to get to that next step. I'm much lighter than I was. Well, here he also explained to me, "Danda equals stick in Sanskrit." Probably Krishnamacharya did not use the word "equals." Maybe he said "Danda in Sanskrit is stick." So probably there are some small inaccuracies in my transcription of K's words. I tried to be exact, but nothing's perfect. From the notebook: "Must keep lower, middle, upper portions of body like a stick. Lower is buttocks, rectum, thighs, knees, legs, ankles, feet and toes. Middle is shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, hands, fingers, chest, stomach, gut and genitals. Upper is neck, face and head. Throat pit: place at the bottom of throat where the two collar bones join. Constriction of inside of throat at that point produces hissing sound. Stick pose is very good for reducing fat, for tonsil complaints, to free circulation and respiration and pain in joints."

Leslie: He's teaching you as if he's teaching a teacher.

Richard: Well yes, he told me at the end that I was very good, that I could teach

it, and I have. I am very proud of my guru's approval.

Leslie: But right from the beginning, even—I mean, this is the first lesson, yes?

Richard: Yes, this is the first lesson. So, I don't know. You know, it was like me and The Mother [of Auroville, Pondicherry, Mirra Alfassa]. I've had some weird—that's an awful word for what's happened. I mean extraordinarily strong encounters in my life with, I don't know what to call them, enlightened people, and it's always an instant connection and they almost always have said to me, you know, like Mother, "You come live here." When I started with Krishnamacharya, I didn't know that this was to teach. I did ask him later, could I teach. He said yes. But I had no idea that he was doing that from the beginning, until you told me.

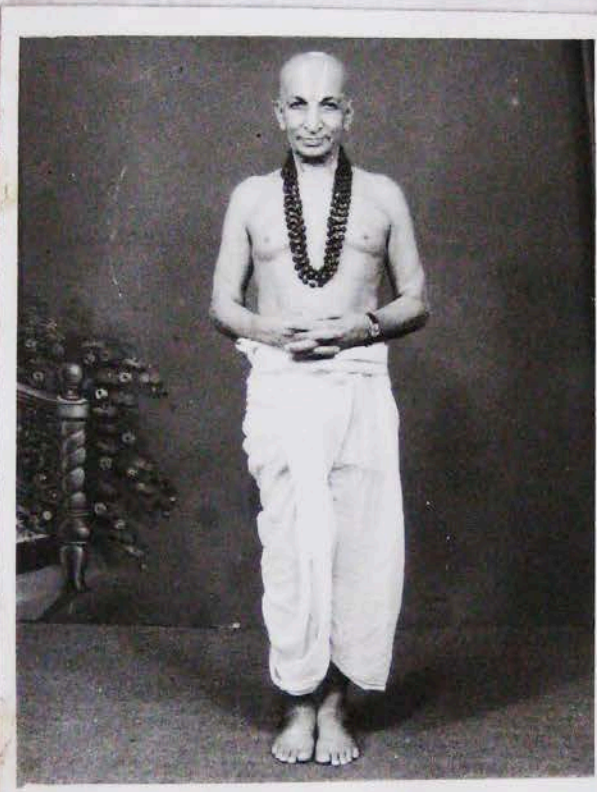
Leslie: [to Eddie] Is that pretty clear to you?

Eddie: [to Leslie] Yes. [To Richard] He's telling you the instruction and he's telling you the benefit all at the same time. And it's no easy thing to fill people in on the benefits all at the same time.

Richard: Well, this is the first lesson.

K's Friends: Japa YAEJI WATANABE, INST. OF Devel. Economies. ICHIGAYA
 TOKYO.
 O.R. Rapp UNICEF. APARTADO NERO 75-55, Bogota, Columbia. K thought
 I was going to Columbia NOT Colombo Ceylon.

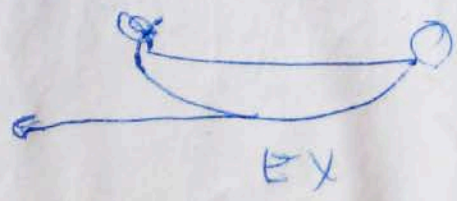
Jan. 72. J. comes to class. K. speaks to both of us. Very short class. Disjointed
 excited, sad, confused. K. says I can teach J. after 3+ months practice/
 alone; after J. I can teach "friends" - i.e. to group. tells me to EX after
 while rising in Desk pose, etc. - but after - "w/ lean bodies" should
 IN while rising.
 All graduate (shrink)
 K serves cakes & tea



Seems or later
 to lean boy status.
 he one last exercise.

Bow POSTURE

Lay face down, palms face up.
 While EX knee bend slowly hold ankle rise chest.



IN Down.

Leslie: The instruction is for you, and then this is for others. When he tells you the benefit, this is implying that it's going to be used for other people.

Richard: Right. We were moving pretty quickly, as you can see. The 9th of November is dandasana, the "stretching pose." What he called the counter-pose, the "four-legged table," I don't know what that is [in Sanskrit]. I still do that. "Rest 3 minutes." And then he ends with telling about the "hints" and what yoga is based on. "These poses you should practice continually." In other words, by that he meant don't begin one without the other. Like the shoulder stand, the headstand and the body twist, always do them [sequentially]. So, when people can't do a headstand, which is sometimes true, I do a shoulder stand and this – what I call twist – with them. Now, when I say teach it, I only teach it in the context of a performance workshop for actors I'm training. I don't consider myself a yoga teacher. I would never do what you guys are doing; you're really yoga teachers. I would teach it to people who have acted, and they have used it for a long time and I've taught a lot of people in that sense. It usually is 3 weeks or 6 weeks. At any rate [returns to reading], "Hints: Do not practice with loaded stomach. Do not exhale/inhale with force. Do not speak in the middle of an exercise." [laughter] "Should not be practiced in the open air." That was really striking to me. "Breath comes short, breath whistles, much dust." Of course, that's India. "No smoking. Do not eat too much chili." And then, "Yoga is based God, mind, soul, breath, restricted diet." And then he said it [again as] "Restricted diet, soul, mind, God." So, that's the progression. And then I said [in my notes], "Krishnamacharya reminds me of Don Juan from Castineda. His pale brown eyes, especially his right eye on my left, is penetrating. Purely an instrument, that goes deep. His first question to me: 'What do you want?'" I wish I had written down what I answered.

Leslie: When I showed up in India to study with his son [Desikachar], his

first question to me, on the first private session, was, "Why are you here?"

Richard: Same idea. And then, when he's telling me the L-form, the urdhva prasarita padasana, the up-stretched foot, then, "When I finished it, Krishnamacharya tells me, 'Do not do this exercise fast.' He shows how many people do it fast. 'This is very harmful to internal organs. After few years, liver, stomach, bladder, other organs all out of shape.' I reflect on the hysterical way some of our association exercises"—that's something I did [in the theatre]—"are sometimes done. After first day, when he was imperious and distant, Krishnamacharya is now closer, more immediate and present to me. He laughs. He fixes me with both his eyes. About my pot belly, he is encouraging: 'In 2 weeks, no more.'" [laughs] Ha ha. Krishnamacharya, if only you knew. [laughter]

Leslie: Well, he's motivating you.

Richard: Definitely. So, again, just ask me something. This is a really long [section of the notebook]. These are the instructions.

Leslie: How far into it did he do something other than this. There's no twisting or lateral movements at all. These are all very sagittal—

Richard: They're very simple

Leslie: They're very simple, symmetrical, on-both-sides-of-the-body kinds of poses. Where's the first place where he has you do something other—

Richard: Twisting?

Leslie: Yeah, or lateral. And you're not standing, either.

Richard: No, we get to the standing poses. And here, I haven't read these... [he leafs further ahead in his notes] This is still very hard, to bring my legs down. So that's the twisting, and there's a counter-pose.

Leslie: And here, this is interesting. He had something under your head.

Richard: Oh yes, he always had something under my head at that point, for the lying postures. I still use that.

Leslie: But it makes your chin tuck more.

Richard: Yeah, that's the point. He wanted my chin down.

Leslie: These days, people put things under the shoulders to take pressure off the neck. [To Eddie and Daniel] He's got him in dvipada pitham here, with something under the head.

Richard: I always put something under the head, still. I put a little yoga brick or roll up a towel, or my shoe, to keep my chin down. You don't advise that?

Leslie: This is classical form. Jalandhara bandha is really the first bandha you learn.

Daniel: I think they look at the amount or thoracic kyphosis, right? I went to the Mohans [A.G. and Indra Mohan, students of Krishnamacharya] with a private client of mine who had a big thoracic curve, and they kept saying to him that he needed something under his head, because of that.

Leslie: Well, if you have that big a curve, you can't lie down on your back if your head's not on something, because your head won't reach the floor.

Daniel: And it hurt his neck.

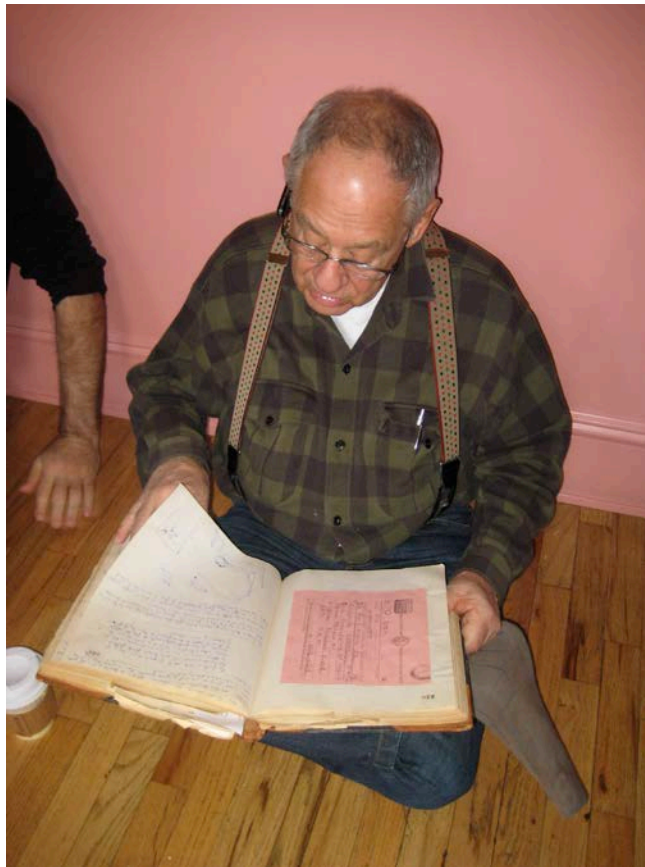
Leslie: But this is something different; this is making the tuck happen.

Daniel: Richard, do you think you had a lot of curve [in your upper back] at that point?

Richard: No.

Leslie: You were able to lie flat on your back without a support under your head?

Richard: Yeah, I could lie flat. But he told me to do it. You see, when I study with this kind of teacher, I'm not critical, I'm just And that's the way I like people when they study this kind of thing with me. And I always say to them, "If you don't know the reason why, sooner or later you'll know the reason why, and it won't be me that tells you." So, it's one thing when I teach theory; then, I explain. But when I teach practical things, I never explain. To me, it's a kind of enlightenment that comes. Or, it's like a horizon. I've always found yoga to be like sailing a ship. You're looking at an island out there, and then you reach it and you realize there's more sea on the other side. It's always infinite. So, in my own mind, my infinite challenge is to inhale forever— or exhale forever. You know, to extend the breath. [continues to go through his notes.] Here, is where he said I could teach... Here are the standing poses... Here, he said that I learned the first of 7 levels. And when I do it, I do the standing poses first, even though he doesn't do them first, because I changed the sequence. I have a sequence in which I personally do yoga, and I start with the standing poses and all these poses first, and [then] the twisting. I don't know why I did that, but I did it.



Leslie: So, when he said 7 levels, the implication was that there were 7, sort of, sequences? That you learn each one as a unit, and progress through them as he teaches you? Or, when he said 7, was it this model [points to diagram in the notebook, with concentric circles].

Richard: Yeah, here are circles. Well, I don't know, but here I see that's also 7. So, let me see what he said here...

"December. Today is the end of the

lesson, which that day was effective but very short, less than half an hour, I asked K again about the meaning of the word yoga. He laughed again, as though all this curiosity of mine was very funny. I was sitting and he was standing, and he began moving around rapidly, almost dancing. Today again, for the first time in a few weeks, he started grinning, giving me again Sanskrit names for exercises. He explained that yoga meant union with the supreme God, but that there were circles of yoga. Outer body,

internal body, senses, mind, breath, soul and supreme God. 'A man cannot control the world but he can control his body. The way to be supreme God, your God, is inward.' When I numbered the circles from outside in, he corrected me, 'No, supreme God is the first circle'— See [points to diagram], I started numbering them the wrong way— "then the soul, the breath, the mind, the senses, the internal physical body and the outer physical body." And then he gave me the word salamba, with

support, sarvangasana, the shoulder stand. [leafs through pages] I think, rather than read these out of order, I should read some of these things, letters he showed me, and— it's quite a bit. I wonder what's the last thing he said. [leafs through pages] See, now we are doing the headstand in the lotus, which I sometimes do. I find that a real pleasurable accomplishment. To do the lotus headstand, then to bring my folded legs down to my belly, and lift up again. This I used to do quite easily. It's much more difficult now. But I hope to be able to do it again someday.

Daniel: Did you put something under your head, for headstand?

Richard: No, no, just rest my forehead on a soft mat. But I can also do a head stand on the wooden floor. I like the headstand. I am not good at it as I was. Later, I added— I was able to go into a lotus pose in a headstand and bring my feet down and up, and I really like that, but now, I have to practice a little more. Here he starts pranayama: "prana: breath, life / yama: long."

Leslie: Yama long?

Richard: That's what he said.

Leslie: Was it yama or ayama?

Richard: Y-A-M-A, and I always thought that was death, but anyway, Y-A-M-A.

Leslie: Actually, long is ayama.

Richard: Well, I'm not going to change my notebook...

[RS: I can understand my misunderstanding. "Pran- ayama" which I understood as "prana yama." The pronunciation would be the same, because Indians often drop the final "a."]

Leslie: No, no, no! [laughter] I'm not asking you to change it. The way that word is broken up really shades the meaning in a very different way, and usually people do say prana and yama, but it's prana plus ayama, and that's what long is.

Richard: Prana-ayama.

Leslie: Yeah, yama means restraint, or control. But ayama reverses it; it means to remove restraint or control.

Richard: Right, long.

Leslie: So, that's your thing with the infinite breath, of that breath that never reaches its end; that's ayama.

Eddie: You know, another really nice thing about your analogy about the ocean and when you get to an island, there's still the infinite ocean after, is that in the Yoga Sutras it says that perfection of asana comes from relaxation of effort, and meditation or absorption in the infinite.

Richard: Oh, wow. Wow. [continues further ahead in notes] So, now he's giving variations of headstands and shoulder stands. I didn't realize how much. Oh, the kneeling pose. And then he give me my mantra.

Leslie: I want to apologize, by the way, for peeking at that. When I saw it, I shouldn't have said anything [at the presentation at the Breathing Project], but I suspected when you said it was secret, which one it was. There's a famous story about that.

[RS: I wish you would put in the famous story! I want to know the famous story. How come I didn't have the patience when we met to wait for you to tell the story? Bad me.]

Richard: [leaves ahead] This is the last class. 2nd of January, that's the end of this. Very short class.

Leslie: [Looking a picture of Krishnamacharya that Richard has in his notebook, given to him by

Krishnamacharya] This is pretty much what he looked like, at that time?

Richard: Yes, very accurate.

Leslie: I'm curious, prior to running into Daniel at the club, had you had an inkling of the stature of Krishnamacharya?

Richard: I knew that he was Iyengar's teacher, because anybody who looks at Light On Yoga sees his dedication. So, I knew he was the teacher of a very well-respected teacher. And I was very proud inside, not being a humble person yet, to have studied with someone who was a teacher of such a [teacher]. So that put me, in my own mind, on a par with Iyengar. [laughter]

Eddie: Maybe even better! [laughter]

Richard: I was the secret teacher. But I would never write "Dark on Yoga." [laughter]

Leslie: But what I will say is that you're still practicing exactly what Krishnamacharya taught you.

Richard: Absolutely.

Leslie: Iyengar studied with him and then went north and really developed his own system.

Richard: Well, that's good. That's good for him. But this was such an important period, two months in my life. I mean, it's only two months. Yeah, even less— two months less six days. But, you know, that's a lot of notebook on that. I'm aware of my age chronologically and I'm aware of my age mentally and physically, and they don't exactly compute. And the difference is largely this practice. Because, of the people I deal with and talk to— and my students and people like you, all of whom are younger— and then, when I do meet people my own age, who, I must confess I don't usually like very much [laughter] but I see them in living a different mindset and certainly a different physical set. They're not about to walk up seventeen flights of stairs because, well they simply cannot.

Leslie: You do it because you can.

Richard: Well, I do it because if I miss the gym— I know you go into to the gym and you do a step climb— so instead of paying sixty dollars... I'll just walk up to my apartment seventeen flights up.

Leslie: So, you still live in a walk-up. [laughter]

Eddie: Just like the old days.

Leslie: Just like the old days. I lived in a walk-up, but I was on the first floor.

Richard: Yeah? That's good. [laughter] So, do you want me to read any of these notes afterwards?

Eddie: Well, there was one thing that I had wanted to ask you, which was basically a repetition of something you had said at the end when you came to speak to us last time. You said some very nice things about parampara and about lineage, and about how you felt lineage was a process-oriented endeavor.

Richard: You know, one thing that's bad about me... the other part of whatever spiritual practice I have is kind of like a zen. And that's why people often do, in my classes, tape record, because when I'm on that kind of level, I don't remember at all what I said. I have no idea of what I said.

Eddie: Yeah, I know exactly the—

Richard: I certainly can't repeat it, because I don't recall it.

Eddie: Well, how about if I just ask you, what are your feelings about lineage?

Richard: Well, it would be kind of kind of false, because you already told me. [laughter] I do think that person-to-person transmission is the best kind of transmission. Books are okay and they can be useful, in the same way as, in the production of classical drama, a play, a text, can be useful. So, it's good to have Shakespeare's text of Hamlet,

but that's not Hamlet. Hamlet is only what happens on stage. So, it's useful to have that text, and you may even want to enunciate that text. And that text may even be the core of the Hamlet, but the particular Hamlet is what is put on stage. So that, I would say that I became a teacher because I believe that. I don't believe in distance learning. You know, I'll listen to DVDs and CDs and all, but real teaching can only take place in a space where people encounter each other, and usually twenty or less. Maybe this is personal taste, that you need four, five, or six to get enough synergy so people can ask questions. And more than 25 or so and you lose the sense of community, real in-touch community. I'm not a tutor teacher either. I mean, I have office hours and all, but I like a seminar situation or a workshop situation. So, if I transpose that back to lineage, yes. X begets Y begets Z. You know that the mythos behind the begets in the Bible is to make a chain of human knowledge that can go back however far it goes back. This is probably not what I said those days ago.

Leslie: No, you were quoting something about what we leave in our wake.

Richard: You didn't record it, right? [chuckles]

Leslie: No, but there was the thought of what we leave once we're gone, what remains of us—

Richard: Is our students.

Leslie: Is our students.

Richard: Yeah, I mean, these documents also remain, but basically what remains is our students. And that can fetch back very far. I sometimes, in a class, say, okay, let's say you're fifty. You are in your vital time. Or, fifty-five. And you teach something really important to a five-year-old. And that five-year-old remembers it. And when that five-year-old gets to be fifty-five, she teaches it to a five-year-old. How far back can this class reach? So, it goes 2000, 1950, 1900, 1850. You know, it takes

twenty people to get back a thousand years. And I said, isn't possible that if something is really remembered, you really found it important and you really teach it, that it'll be passed on intact? It'll be somewhat changed, but it won't change that much. So, we can reach back quite far into human knowledge history by means of oral transmission. And I believe that. So, I don't know, I'm not a historian in yoga, but it seems to me that yoga is one of those practices, at least as I learned it. Krinamachrya was very precise. Now, I know that in oral tradition there are always variations. As you say, Iyengar went and developed his own. And I've taken this sequence, and when I teach it, I teach it not in the order he taught it to me but in a different order. I do the standing poses first... I do the seated poses last. And I don't know why I decided to do that. I'm more comfortable with it, so I do it. I do it as he taught it, but I do it in a different order. So, I know that there are all these variations, but at the same time there's a core that remains consistent, and I think that's really important. And, you know, I know people think it's threatened by all this digital stuff. I'm not of that opinion. I think the digital stuff, like print before, will coexist. I don't see a great diminishment in people wanting a face-to-face. Especially when it's something important.

Eddie: That was an amazing thing you just said about someone when they reach fifty-five telling another five-year-old. And that means to go back a thousand years you only need, twenty people.

Richard: Twenty, exactly.

Leslie: Twenty people exactly.

Richard: It's a thousand years!

Eddie: So, if the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, theoretically, were written, say 2,500 years ago, we only need fifty people to keep that link of teaching alive, and that's like nothing. Fifty.

Richard: You could play that chain game and say, "Really remember this sentence!" And... it could be remembered.

Leslie: Well, in the gurukula system it's really close to that, because you have someone presumably in their fifties teaching seven-year-olds who come into the system at around that age.

Richard: Right.

Eddie: It's so great, because people, so many people doubt, "Well, okay, 2,500 years, 5,000 years, is that really what he was talking about?" But if you put it in your model— I need fifty people to remember— well, yeah.

Richard: Right. And if it's a deep memory, if it's a deep, psycho-physical body memory, then we will—

Eddie: And, also, simple sentences. Atha yoganusasanam. Anyone can remember that. It's not a big deal.

Richard: Right. Right.

Leslie: And, also, if those teachings are connecting you with something that is just true in the universe.

Richard: Right. Yes, it's confirmed— well, you see, you would put it at that level. I would put it at a more modest level. It's confirmed in your body-mind, your body-soul. The confirmation, the payoff of yoga, is doubled. First of all, the practice is fun to do, it's beautiful, if you do it. And secondly, you just look around, you say, I have something that these people who are not doing it, don't have. I mean, it's so obvious.

Leslie: Like when you're hanging out with the other alte cockers?

Richard: Yeah, right. Exactly. They say, well, how do you do it? I say, it's real simple, you've just got to breathe this way. You should have started it sooner, but you can do it now. [laughter] So, that is a very powerful argument for people maintaining the practice and passing it on. Because also, passing it on, aside from it being a profession— I mean, things are multiple— it's also an act of love. So, it's both. And I see no contradictions. It can be both. I mean,

you've gotta pay the rent, but you're also doing something noble.

Leslie: Well, you know, that's an interesting distinction about this particular lineage in that it consists of householders. It's not a monastic tradition. These people had to earn a living.

Richard: Right. Right. Right. Oh yes, and he was practicing in his home. I still have— I didn't bring it in, I should have— I still have my first little yoga rug. A small carpet. He didn't give it to me, but he said I should practice on something, and they didn't have little purple yoga mats. And I went to the market and I bought a little, cheap rug. Or maybe the mother of the household I was living in gave it to me. I don't remember. It was really cheap, and it's got kind of, like, a mosque or a temple on it. It's of some kind of synthetic fabric. It's about this big, enough so that my butt and my head are on the mat. I don't care about my arms or my feet. And I still keep it. I don't practice on it, but I have some books on it. I have it in my study. I practice, now, at the gym. Or, at home, I have a yoga mat.

Leslie: I have a technical question, because the stick figures fascinate me, because you draw them so well. I suspect this isn't the first thing you've documented with stick figures.

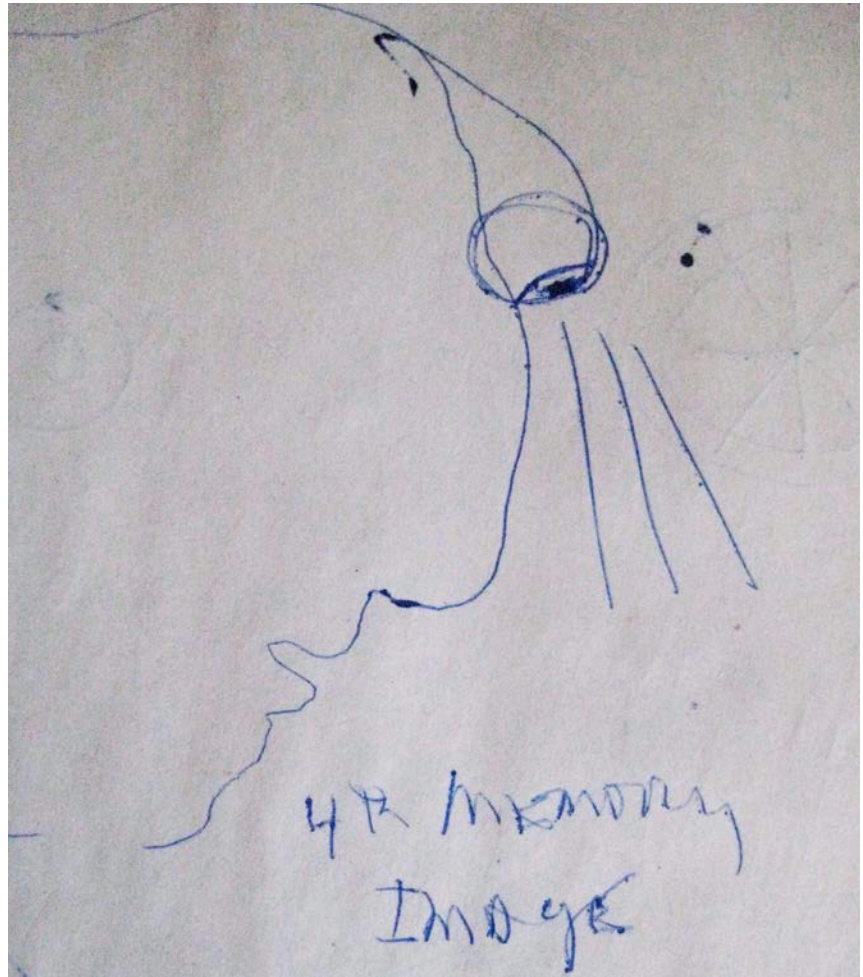
Richard: No, no. All through here [leafs through the notebook] are my kathakali notes and other things. I'm left-handed, which means—

Eddie: [Looking at photos] Is that The Mother?

Richard: Yes, that's The Mother. And I met her. Oh, she wanted me to live with her, to move to Auroville, to give up everything. You weren't here when I was showing them these pictures.

Leslie: Show him the drawings you did of her.

Eddie: Wow. Oh my gosh.



Richard: So, when I got to see her, she selected me out of the crowd and took me into her inner sanctum, and laid my head on her lap and looked at me.

Leslie: It's the solstice.

Eddie: Oh, my birthday.

Richard: Oh, wow. Congratulations.

Eddie: December 21st. I was four years old that day.

Leslie: Kausthub's birthday, too.

Eddie: Oh, that's right. We should have a joint birthday party.

Richard: Anyway, being right-brained (left-handed people are right-brained), I'm always drawing. Where are those drawings, where are they? This is Aurobindo himself.

Eddie: Three stages of his life.

Richard: Right. And this is three stages of The Mother's life.

Eddie: Wow.

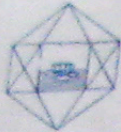
Richard: She was a very powerful person, and I wrote some essays about meeting her. [leafs through pages] This is the Krishnamacharya letter. This is giving me his address to go to his first class. So, The Mother and Krishnamacharya.

Eddie: Wow, mother and father. [laughter] Grandmother and grandfather, actually, at that point.

Richard: Yeah. And I want to find these pictures. See, I was doing stick drawings. That's kathakali, or bharatanatyam.

Leslie: When did you start using stick figures?

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SRI AUROBINDO SOCIETY

GRAMI SOCIETY
PHONE: 382

Society House
PONDICHERRY-2
(INDIA)

21.12.1971.

Ref: KD.

My dear Richard,

I was in receipt of your letter and am glad to inform you that ^{The}MOTHER has permitted ^{with} you to come here for offering your respects on 24th morning. It would be better, therefore, if you are here on 23rd evening or at the latest by 8 A.M. on 24th. You will go and await upstairs around 9/30 A.M. to be called at ^{The}MOTHER's convenience. Looking forward to seeing you during your visit. Please confirm your programme.

With love to you and Joan MacIntosh.

Yours sincerely

U. Dhandhanian

To:
Mr. Richard Schechner,
c/o Sri K. Ramaswamy,
6A, Malavia Ave,
Madras-41.

P.S. I have also sent a telegram

inf

Richard: I'd have to go back and look back at my notebooks, but fairly early on. I mean, this is notebook 42.

Leslie: Do you have some of the things you learned from Grotowski you documented in a similar way?

Richard: There's a whole journal just about Grotowski's first workshop in the USA, in 1967. This journal was written by a couple of men who, along with me, were in that workshop at NYU which Grotowski ran with Ryszard Cieslak. But this notebook I am showing you now, has stuff about the Mother. When Joan MacIntosh and I went to Auroville, we were among a horde of people waiting to see the Mother. Then this guy came up to us, Navajata I think his name was, he was the director or manager of Auroville, a man who was very close to the Mother. He pulled us out of line of people waiting to meet the Mother. He told us, "I invite you here because I get good vibrations. Otherwise, you could have waited up there with the rest." And then, this is from my notebook: "We wait. I am afraid and hungry and my breath stinks. I wonder, 'How should I look, with my eyes?' 'As you are,' the voice inside said. Mischievously, I answered, 'How's that?' So, all the mixtures of truth and lies, faith and hypocrisy, reality and mask. I remember Grotowski: 'In India they will take you to very holy persons. It doesn't matter whether they are authentic or not. Go.'" The last thing I wrote in that notebook about the Mother: "Just saw the Mother. She looked at me. Longer at Joan, who was first. Smiled at Joan and smiled at me. What an incredibly old woman, and how concentrated in her neck, her cheeks, her right eye. Then, when she smiles, her lower face, her mouth and chin dissolve, disappear as wholly fluid. I left trembling. I am confused. Unknowing, confused, trembling, without knowledge. Her look, penetrating. She did not know, she saw." I was left with such a strong physical impression of her [showing drawings from notebook]. Meeting the Mother was much different from the first meeting with Krishnamacharya,

because that was sympathetic, and after, we had a fairly long time together when I was learning something from him. But the Mother was an instant penetration.

Leslie: So, at this time there is a lot of interest by Westerners to experience things Indian. Were there big crowds of Westerners there?

Richard: Yeah, especially in Auroville. Because Auroville is part of Pondicherry and Pondicherry was a French colony. And then, I'll just read this, how I felt right after encountering the Mother: "Effects will be a long time settling in. [...] Unsettled, ill at ease, unfinished, restless, incomplete, troubled, turbulent, angry, tossed around, toyed with, teased, deceived, played with, unknowing, stomach restless, angry, mad, enraged, powerless, not the greatest, limited, not worshipped, ignored, small, helpless, abandoned, tricked, left alone, hate, kill, murder, chop up, cut up, hack up, scissor up, knife, dismember, cut off, castrate, do in, revenge, butcher, get, never forget, take out on, get my own back, bite, scratch, teach, show, prove, defend, close off, be my own, leave alone, prove, victorious, a thousand year war, destroy, show, teach, lead, grow..." [chuckles] So, it seems, I'm not such a good guy. Anyway, let's get back to more peaceful things.

Daniel: It makes me think of Kali.

Richard: Yes.

Leslie: It makes me think of Brecht and Weill.

Richard: I had such reactions. So, "17 November. Did my yoga. Still trembling. A very bum session of 35 minutes. Instead of peace and getting it together, everything went wrong. My body couldn't/didn't do the exercises. My head didn't/couldn't 'pray God.' Instead, there was noise which disturbed me. I mistakenly kicked the walls and 'fell' off my mat/rug, which kept slipping on the floor." ...

Leslie: Were you able to hold that

context, at that time, having those experiences?

Richard: You mean, this context, this—

Leslie: The one you're describing, that you're just bringing up psychological content through the practice.

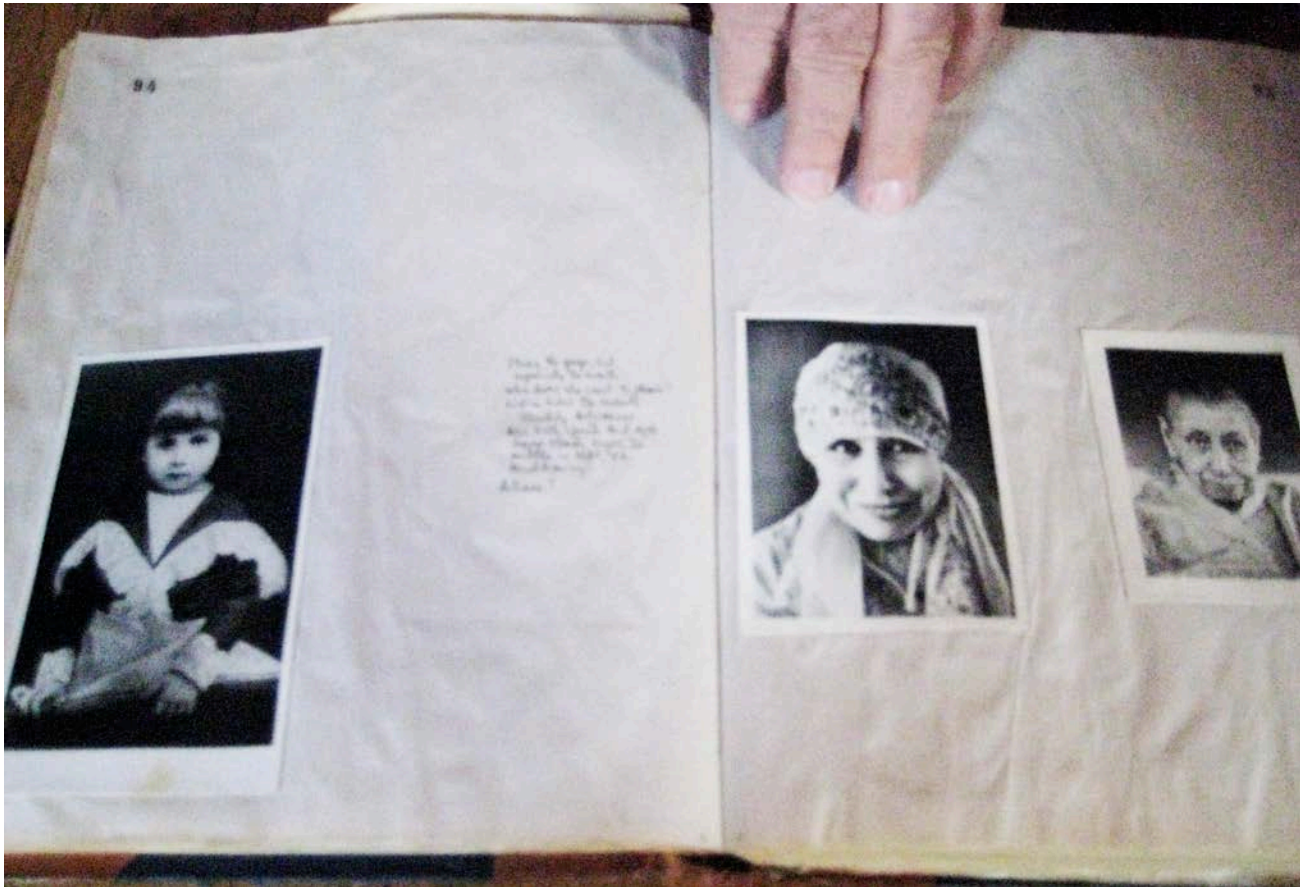
Richard: Yes, I mean, I think of the practice of yoga like zen sitting, which I don't do very much of, but sitting still as you witness your own thoughts. While you're doing it, you witness your— the image I think of is of seawater passing through a net. And it depends on how open you leave the net. Things pass, but sometimes you want to retain things, catch them and deal with them. But that happens.

Eddie: You have a lot of water images that you work with.

Richard: I know, I don't know why. I'm very attracted to water. I was born in August, August 23rd. My family had a house— my brother still owns it, actually— at Bradley Beach, New Jersey, about sixty miles south of here. And I've spent lots of times at that house, which is about a hundred feet from the ocean, and looking at the ocean. I love the ocean, because it's both peaceful and stormy. It can change, but it's never-changing. I'm doing a piece now called Swimming to Spalding. You know, Spalding Gray. There are a lot of water images in that, too.

Leslie: Also, you say you're a student of vedanta, and there are so many ocean and wave analogies that are used in that teaching.

Richard: Right. So, I want to see— Oh yeah, here it is. "November 18, 8:30." So, I studied with him early in the morning. "K tells me that he thinks I will be able to complete one course in the time here. 'There are seven courses to yoga,' he says. He is warming to me. Also, he is old in some respect. He shows me the letter from the French couple for the second time. He is very pleased



with his ‘testimonial letters,’ and letters asking him to teach. He gives me his card. ‘Professor T. Krishnamacharya.’ Acharya=professor. [I am sure that I wrote = I do that all the time.] He was nearly forty when he got his degree to teach. Also, I think he expects, or at least knows, that I will teach what I learn. During an exercise this morning, he tells me that the exercise is good ‘for backache,’ in a way that recognizes that I will tell others so.” So, by that time, I was recognizing that this is what he was doing.

Leslie: And you said you had made some observations of the household, of the extended family, the fact that he was a grandfather.

Richard: Only to know that it was there. As I recall. I mean, I wish I had written it down. We met in a upper floor which was quite bright and airy, early in the morning. I would get up at 6 or so. My lesson was 7:30 or 8, for an hour or so. But I don’t remember much about the household except that it was a household. There were people there. It was not a school, it was a house, and he had this room where he taught— or, where he taught me, at least.

Leslie: Well, at that hour there would be, maybe, sounds from the kitchen, or breakfast being prepared, or—

Richard: That I don’t know. There certainly were sounds from the streets of Madras, but I don’t remember the other. I mean, I was also very concentrated with him. If I were to ask, if you were not to give me a leading question and just say, “Were there any sounds,” I would say, “No, I just remember him.” And I do remember the room.

Daniel: [to Eddie] There’s this picture from Ramaswami that you had in an article. Do you have that issue around? That might jog his memory. It’s of Krishnamacharya sitting in his chair.

Eddie: Oh, yeah.

Daniel: Maybe it’s the same room.

Leslie: I do recall all the noise that comes in, of the crows and the children.

Richard: Absolutely, the crows. I remember that. [caws loudly three times with astonishing verisimilitude]

Leslie: But there’s a school across the street as well, which can get quite noisy at times.

Richard: Oh, now, here’s something very interesting, I’ll read this. He’s giving me the tree pose. “K says, ‘When wind moves a tree, it moves this way, that way, backwards, forwards. Your body depends on your breath and moves all ways.’ Later, he says there are 12, maybe 18, variations of the tree pose. He asks me, slyly even, if his English is good. ‘It is no good!’ I tell him it is very good, which it is. He becomes more and more human in his relation to me, and remains a very fond teacher. Of the tree pose, ‘If a very short man practices this 6 months, his height will grow, but only with the inhale-exhale system. I wonder if this system is exclusively his. He tells me not to practice more than 45 minutes at a time. This includes few minutes rest in middle. ‘Yoga is mental, spiritual, not wrestling.’ He says, ‘Too many people battle and torture their way through yoga, go too fast.’ He is happy I take the time to breathe. He wishes me goodbye and I wish him goodbye for the weekend.” [continues, reading entry from another day] “This morning I got up at 5:30am and practiced on the patio. While I worked it became dawn. I first awoke around 5 but did not get out of bed, afraid to disturb Joan, but from now on, the night before I’ll leave my clothes and mat and book out here and go to yoga as soon as I awake. I think that will frequently be before 5. After all, my second period of sleeping has long been a convention and a cop-out, not a bio need. Now, I will use that extra time for study. I think at last I am developing a work discipline. Still, this morning, reading about disassociation, I felt sick again. How I like to identify with psychic illness. But I can scarcely afford the luxury of it anymore. My childhood is ending.” Then, the 21st

of November: “As I do the yoga, I am forced to acknowledge that my stomach is my enemy. It intrudes and blocks so many exercises. I am not able to double up, because in the back my tendons are short and in the front my stomach is like a pillow that will compress so far but no further...” You see, I drew a picture. “Also, when I contemplate in a shoulder stand, my stomach is like this [picture is diagrammed].” And it was hard to pull it in. “Impossible. Thus the issue is joined, because my stomach is a psychic and spiritual fact, as well as the physical one” Now, the 23rd: “K is not feeling too well this morning. He does not say so, but when I come up, he is working with Mrs. Miller and drinking tea or coffee. I have never seen him drink anything before. Also, I come and he says, ‘I am an old man.’ I don’t ask him to explain. After all, he is 85 and had every reason to say he is an old man. But still, my impulse was to say, ‘No, you are not old.’ Later, he tells me how to organize my yoga notes for teaching. ‘Each section, yes, standing positions, laying positions, jumping, sitting positions, face up positions, face down.’ But for now, I must keep this book as it is, chronologically.”

Leslie: I think I mentioned to you that Pat Miller is still teaching. I’m sure that’s the Mrs. Miller you saw.

Richard: Right, it must be. Where is she teaching?

Leslie: Down in the sort of Maryland/ DC area.

[Eddie has found the back issue of Namarupa with Srivatsa Ramaswami’s article, and shows Richard the photo of Krishnamacharya.]

Richard: See, he is much older-looking here. I don’t know when this was taken, but this... I wouldn’t recognize. His face is gaunt. He’s got a deerskin. And he’s got the Vishnu— This is kind of formal. See, this is how I remember him [shows black and white portrait given to him by Krishnamacharya]. This [Ramaswami’s photo] is not. This— I don’t like this

picture [laughs] because it's too full of symbols.

Leslie: He always had the mark when you saw him, didn't he?

Richard: Yes, he always had the mark, but the deerskin? I like him in his dhoti. Anyway, that's probably just my association. So, what else? I've got to go someplace... Tonight's the first night of Hanukkah.

Eddie: Happy Hanukkah.

Richard: Thank you. My wife and I are going to synagogue and then we're going out to supper.

Leslie: That reminds me, when his first instruction was to "Face east and pray God," how do you take that?

Richard: Well, I'm a Jewish Hindu atheist, right? So, I'm an initiated Hindu, I'm a bar mitzvah'd, circumcised Jew. I go to synagogue because I like the historical identifications. So, I would face east. "Pray God?" You know, that's between me and God. In the sense that I don't believe there is a— [pause] You know, the older I get, the more I kind of hedge my bets. [Leslie laughs] You know, it's Pascal's wager. You know Pascal's wager?

Leslie: [laughing] Yes.

Richard: So, Pascal the French philosopher has been an atheist his whole life. He's on his deathbed and he says, "Send for the priest." And all his friends, his philosoph friends, are scandalized and say, "Pascal, your whole life, you're our staunchest atheist, and now on your deathbed you're asking for a priest? This is a scandal! You can't do that!" He says, "It's just a bet. If there is no God, what difference does it make? And if there is a God, who wouldn't accept the bet and go to heaven?" [laughter] So, Pascal's wager. Now, I'm not about to take Pascal's wager. I think God has probably outsmarted that. So, for me, if there is a God, it's the whole creation. What I don't see any need for,

even in my old age, is that the universe is created. And I don't see any need for any individual deity. But, of course, all these deities that you have here [in the Sri Ganesha Temple] I also do puja to, when I am in India, and even when I am not. And I am more or less of an expert on the

Ramayana and the Ramlila, and the yogis and sadhus and stuff that goes around in Benares. And, I have lived in temples. And my Hindu friend says I'm a very good Hindu because Hinduism and Judaism, at least my branch, depend more on practice than belief. Belief is so secondary to practice. Or, the practice is the belief. Who knows? These are great mysteries. So, therefore, articulating the belief is just a human attempt to crack a mystery that's not going to be cracked. So, practice is important. And I enjoy various religious practices, but I don't support the theology behind them, and I also hate very much the violence that religion has— the ideologies of religion... I shudder when I read the Old Testament and see everybody being exterminated, man, woman, and child. God decided, "Well, it didn't work, so destroy it all except for Noah." Or, Sodom and Gomorrah. Or Isaac. God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, and Abraham agreeing. I don't like that. We disagree, me and God. That God. But also, I don't like Śiva cutting off his son's head, even though I'm Jayaganesh. So, to answer your question directly, I always face east, if I know where east is. Certainly, in the gym it's easy enough, and in my home it's easy enough. New York doesn't really go north-south, you know? It's kind of interesting. Manhattan island angles, so east would be a little off in that direction and not exactly where the streets are... So, I do the putative east, you know, insofar as I can. And in terms of "pray God," I'm always thinking of these— well, not always, but I churn these problems over. Being a Jewish intellectual and being Talmudic— my grandfather was a Talmudic scholar and I know a lot from him, you know, the books and all that stuff— that's as close as I get to worship. When I go to the synagogue, as I will tonight, I'll sing the prayers I know by

memory, because I know a lot of them from childhood. But I'll read the Bible and I'll think about it. I won't be saying the prayers in the same way.

Eddie: How were you initiated into being a Hindu?

Richard: Well, so, in 1976 when I spent a year in India, I came back with The Performance Group, doing *Mother Courage and Her Children*. And we toured most of North India, and it was really a very interesting tour. And that took about two months. And then, they went home except for Spalding Gray, me, and Joan. And then, Joan went on her own journey someplace in India and later to Japan, and I stayed in India. And I went back to the south. I had been concentrating on the north. I had been all over— from Kashmir and Assam to Kanyukamari where the Vivekananda Rock is — I've been all over India. But when I went back to the south, I wanted to go into the temples. And although, when I'm properly sunburned and when I'm wearing a dhoti or a lungi, I can pass, and people think I am Kashmiri or maybe Bengali. And in the north they sometimes think I'm from the south. I can pass pretty well as an Indian. But I felt both hypocritical and I also felt that if I went into the temple and I was challenged, what would I say? And I didn't feel that that was right, so I checked into an ashram. I said that I wanted to be converted. I wish I had my conversion certificate here, but it's in another notebook. And I asked the Hindu priests, "Could I do that and stay Jewish?" And they said, "Yes, it's no problem. All gods," [chuckles] "bring any of them you like." So, it says, "Richard Schechner, a Jew, has asked to be converted to a Hindu." So, I always look at the conversion not in the Islamic or Jewish sense of a "jealous god" and the giving up of something essential or basic, but of adding on. Jewish law and tradition would, of course, say this is terrible. But for me it's not like giving one up one for the other, it's an addition. So, I was there for about 12 days and there was a huge, I have in the notebook, a huge Sanskrit ceremony,

and after that, I'm a Brahmin. I was given a sacred thread to wear over my shoulder. I have been twice-born. My Hindu name is Jayaganesh, very right for a boy with a belly. When they told me I was a Brahmin I asked if I could be, you know, a little lower down, a Vaiśya, maybe even a Śudra, and they looked at me like, "You're nuts!" [laughter] "You're going to be a Brahmin or nothing." [laughter] So, I still have my sacred thread, and I have my Śiva lingam in my study very close to where I work. My my sacred thread is wound around the Śiva lingam.

Leslie: It was Śaivite initiation.

Richard: Yes. And then, I went into all the temples with my initiation certificate tucked in my inner garment. I was never challenged, because I was so confident that I was Hindu that if ever I was challenged I only had to take the thing out. So I never was, but that was in the south, where they're much more strict about these things. I wanted to go into the inner sanctums of Madurai and Trivandrum, there are some great, great temples.

Leslie: Trivandrum, the Padmanabha temple?

Richard: Yes. They're great temples and there are all these dancing poses – the 108 karanas – at the Chidambaram temple. So, that was the circumstance, but it was also, like so much of my life, which is multi-valent, it was also an acceptance of these great stories, this fabulous tradition, these figures, which are so real to me. Hanuman, Rama. Especially the Ramayana figures, because I've been studying the Ramlila for for so long. And Tulsi Das. [He looks around at the artwork on the walls at AYNV]

Leslie: You must have been thrilled... when you walked in here.

Richard: Yes. Fabulous. Fabulous. There's one [image] that I— oh yeah, there's the one— Hanuman with Ram in his heart. You know how they enact that in the Ramlila? So, at the end, Ram

is restored to the throne. Sita is there. Very complex, because, is this the real Sita, or not? You know, lots of stories about who is really there. But at any rate, Sita gives Hanuman Ji— you know this, about the—

Eddie: Pearl necklace.

Richard: Pearl necklace, and he breaks each one and spits it onto the floor. You know this [asking Daniel]?

Daniel: No.

Richard: So, Sita's going nuts, because these pearls are from the depths of the Arabian Sea. This is the greatest pearl necklace the world has ever known. And Hanuman is just biting them, one by one, looking into his hand-paw, and then, puh [spitting sound], biting, looking, puh! And Sita finally says to him— she can't stand it— "What are you doing? I'm giving you this necklace!" He says, "These pearls are useless. I'm looking for the image of Ram and Sita inside. There's nothing in here! They're empty!" And she says, "Well, where do you have an image of Ram and Sita?" And he says, "In my heart!" [slaps chest]. And she says, "Well, show me." And he takes his hands and rips open his chest exposing his heart. And there in his very heart is Ram and Sita, right inside. Fabulous, fabulous, fabulous. So, those myths are very deep because they are so true, to me. I mean, I'm not very sympathetic, to tell the truth, to the Christian myth of the torture and sacrifice. I can respond to it a little bit. But these myths, I really reverberate to.

Eddie: I don't want to make you late.

Richard: I can be a few more minutes. Do you have anything more?

Eddie: I have lots more questions, but maybe I'll just ask one more for today... Did you ever see Krishnamacharya again on any of your trips to India?

Richard: No. So, this was interesting also. He had given me a great, great gift. I'm not basically— this is probably a failure of mine, you've seen some of

the others— I'm not sentimental and I'm not nostalgic. I mean, in this sense, I'm reliving some of this [through the notebook, through talking about it], so. But if I hadn't practiced yoga, this would not be of interest to me. This would only be of a kind of passing interest, if I hadn't continued practice. And I probably should have gone to Madras again and been with him again, but I— after '71, I don't even know if I ever went back to Madras at all. I was India in '76, but I spent most of my time in Kerala at the Kalamandalam, the school for kathakali. But the simple answer is no. And I feel badly about it. I should have gone back. I should have shown him my notebook. But I didn't.

Eddie: Well, I'm sure he would happy to know you are speaking with us now and these things were treasured to you.

Richard: Absolutely.

Eddie: And it's a treasure for us to see it and to meet you, actually.

Leslie: And, most importantly, that you've been sharing [so much].

Richard: I'm going to see if there is anything else that he said to me that I want to put on this tape recording. "K tells me at the end it is all right for two to practice yoga together, they can learn from each other, but no more than two at a time. Again, he mentions me teaching. He says he doesn't know how I can learn what I need in such a short stay. I tell him I will return for more study. He is sitting, getting ready for the final prayer. He laughs. 'They all say they will return, yes, yes.' He gets up. I start to dress. Then, he remembers he has forgotten the final prayer. This really amuses him. As I leave, he tells me again not to practice fast with jerks or for too long a time at a stretch. 'No more than an hour.' And as I get on my bike, he, as usual, is cooing and playing with his little, beautiful grandson." So, now, it just happened to— see, this is what I mean by this serendipity. You [Eddie] asked me if I had seen him again. I picked the one thing in the notebook.

I had no idea about that. You [Leslie] asked about the family and I picked the one thing that spoke of his grandson. Why does that happen? You see what I mean? Because I didn't know what was written there. And it's the one entry in this whole thing that deals with those two questions, did I ever see him again and the family.

Eddie: And it deals with the thing you were talking about, about lineage, also.

Richard: Right.

Eddie: When the grandson hits five, he is going to learn everything.

Richard: Right. "And he, as usual, was cooing and playing with his little, beautiful grandson."

Leslie: And that grandson is the one who is now going to carry on, because he received from his father, Desikachar.

Richard: Wow. Now, do you know an American boy, Copland? [Reads from notebook] "He shows me a letter from an American boy named Copland."

Leslie: Copland. That sounds so familiar and I should know who that is.

Richard: "He wants to come back and stay for a few years. I read the letter. I hand the letter back and say, 'Very nice.' 'Why nice?' He ... and laughs. 'This boy is 19. He is nice boy but his mind is very—' K shakes and dances his head back and forth. 'He comes and says he can stay for six months. I work out a whole program for him, and after two months, he says, 'I have to leave.' He goes to see his father or something. Then no letters. And how, after two years, this letter? So, why nice?'" [laughter] "Then, K tells me about a professor of philosophy from California who studied every day for one and a half years. He, his wife and his son. 'When he came, he was all bent over,' K demonstrates, 'Bent. Shoulder hunched. Curved back. Very short breath, too. When he left, he was good breath and he is tall.' K laughs. He tells me to remind him to show me

headstand starting tomorrow. He tells me never to do more than 40 minutes of yoga"— he's always worried I'm going to do too much—"at a time, publicly, for demonstrations. He shows me how to breathe more easily from the throat pit. He is glad my breath is coming longer. He will teach me breathing exercises and some contemplation. I feel good, even though I copped out on my own practice this morning, not done with full effort and commitment. The chicken dinner last night weighing in my stomach, I ask K, 'What restricted diet, for me?' He just laughs, "I tell you when we do breathing exercises." [laughter] Well, this has been fun. The ocean is endless.

WHEN THE AUDIO RECORDING of this interview had been transcribed, I forwarded a draft to Richard for his approval. He was traveling (in Europe) but was kind enough to review the full text and answer my questions, and wrote back, "This whole experience with you and your yoga associates has moved me a lot. I'd like to visit again when I return. Going over the materials brought 1971 back again, clear as crystal. And K along with it all, his eyes, his delicate way of moving, his strength, his humanity. And the love and respect you and the others have. A great gift."

Many thanks to you, Richard Schechner, for your gift to us! 🙏

Daniel Dale teaches yoga and works with individuals as a yoga therapist, in the tradition of T. Krishnamacharya (website: omagain.com). Currently he is attending graduate school earning his Masters degree in special education. Also a Norwegian-English translator, Dale received a Cultural Grant Award from the American Scandinavian Society and is translating selected poems of Kolbein Falkeid.



Richard Schechner photographed by his daughter Sophia Schechner.

Richard Schechner is a theatre director and professor. He is editor of *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies*. He is one of the founders of the academic field known as performance studies and is a University Professor at NYU in the Performance Studies Department. Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary approach to performance in all its aspects including rituals, performance in everyday life, sports, popular entertainments, political demonstrations, theatre, dance, music – a very broad spectrum of activities. Schechner is a leading ground-breaker in developing this new, interdisciplinary way of viewing performance that has evolved as a leading global trend both inside and outside the academy. In the theatre, he has directed many plays, having founded in New York, The Performance Group and East Coast Artists. His books include *Environmental Theater*, *The Future of Ritual*, *Performance Theory*, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, and *Performance Studies – An Introduction*.