



Husain Chung

(Editor's note: this all began with an editors' search for an article on Subud, another area concerning Husain Chung. We're still searching, but met Peter Smart on the way. What he has given us has satisfied another long search, for an effective account of what marathons really are, to satisfy the curious and to refresh the veterans. The following article is part of a book-in-progress on Chung's psychodramas. F.N.)

Palo Alto
October 13, 1968

Dear Ian,
hello, hello. Sorry I haven't written for so long, but hope this letter will make up for it. I really have a lot to tell you.

I always seem to be writing letters out of the midst of some frenzy or other. Unload all my shit on my friends. Tonight I'm calm for once, more or less, I think, maybe. Just don't know how I'm going to get down all that's racing around in my mind.

I've been through a tremendous experience since last I wrote to you, maybe the biggest single experience of my life. Has made all these other changes I've been through seem like nothing. All those changes of the summer, just little tremours in the ground, compared to this sudden, violent, earth-shattering explosion. All that drug stuff was to this, something like hand grenades are to hydrogen

bombs. I've never been through anything like it, and yet at the same time I feel my whole life has been leading up to it, that I have found the thing I have been desperately searching for, for so many years in so many different places.

And what am I talking about? What is it of which I speak with such enthusiasm? It is psychodrama, the psychodrama marathon of Husain Chung. Last weekend, went to a psychodrama marathon, forty hours in a room with forty people, continuous psychodrama under the direction of this man Chung. I'd been hearing about it for several months now, strange rumours of this Chinese madman and his forty hour marathons, picked up hints of this experience which couldn't possibly be conveyed in words, but which was incredibly profound, mysterious and terrifying, an experience after which you would never be the same again. I finally got myself together and went, and it was beyond my wildest expectations.

Where to begin, how to describe it. I don't know, so much happened. My head's exploding. I could go on for a book just about that one marathon, so much of so much intensity was packed into those forty hours, so many revelations, people going through such enormous changes, so much happened inside me. I suppose I am in a frenzy after all, but this a frenzy of joy, not despair, just too much to say, too much energy in me, the poor old circuits just aren't used to so much energy, they're overloaded. Will try to calm and organise myself and at least get some of it down.

The key to it all is this man Chung. It's not psychodrama in itself, it's that it's his psychodrama that's important. Psychodrama with anyone else would not be the same experience. I've never come across anyone like him. Maybe there were a couple of people in Indonesia like him, had his strength, his humanity, had realised themselves to the extent he has, but no-one else I can think of. I just realised I don't really know anything about him. I mean in terms of the facts of his life, where he was born and educated and what he has done and so on, what things he's been through to get to where he's at, to know what he knows. I'm curious of course, but really it doesn't seem to matter. Less than with anyone else I've ever met is his identity in that list of "facts", at any moment he's right there and then out-front who he is, naked. He's Chinese, he must be around thirty-five, forty. He's about five feet two or three, has a game leg. Ironic, because inside, he is the tall, strong, whole man, while all the great hulking people are emotional dwarves, psychic cripples. He is very strong, utterly serene. His psychodramas unleash tremendous explosions of energy in people, years and years of pent-up shit, violence, rage, hatred, bitterness, anguish, come bursting out, the walls run with psychic blood, but he remains unperturbed nothing phases him. He seems to have unlimited energy, he's always ON, always moving, rapping, devising and directing the psychodramas, acting roles. I found that it wasn't really difficult to stay awake for the forty hours, too much going on for you to want to sleep, too much energy in the air for you to be able to sleep, but Chung is the only one who is always really AWAKE, alert and aware of everything that's happening.

The psychodramas he devises are sheer genius. He talks to someone for ten or fifteen minutes, picks up on the crucial facts of their life, who they are, the relationships they're involved in, their hang-ups, their problems, their areas of fear and pain, then sketches the loose framework of a psychodrama, the crucial scenes of a life, the essential line, and takes the person back, has them re-enact the key moments of their life, in order to break the old, sick patterns, to literally re-do their life, to liberate themselves from their past. He takes many roles himself and he is a fantastic natural actor. I mean his feelings are instantly and expressively registered in his face and the movements of his body. He played an incredible range of characters, comic and tragic, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, kid brothers, girl-friends, he played them all, and then into far, far-out things, like the Leprachaun of Suicide, the Angel of Death.

Again, there is much more I could say. There is all this stuff going round in my head about his being a symbolic, emblematic person, I mean that he seems almost designed in every way to be doing what he is doing in this place, at this time. The ironic symbolism of his mere appearance, and then on into things like that he is both American and Chinese, that he brings together both East and West, but all this as yet vague and unformulated and will leave until another time.

Friday midnight.

It's the living room of an ordinary suburban house. There's a stereo set up and a few theatre lights hanging from the ceiling. These are the only props.

There's some carpets spread on the floor in the centre of the room and fourty of us sit around them in a circle, smoking, drinking coffee. Already, there's tremendous tension in the air. People's defenses screwed up to the breaking point. Fear or hostility very close to the surface.

Chung comes in with four or five assistants, men and women. They'll take parts in the psychodramas and zap on people and keep things under control. The assistants put everyone even more up-tight. They seem hostile, insufferably contemptuous and arrogant. (It's not until the end of the marathon that you realise how much of this was the projection of your own fear and hostility.)

Chung gives a brief rap. Meals will be served. The bathroom's down the hall. You can sleep, but you must sleep in the room, and don't be surprised if you get woken up. Physical contact, wrestling, slapping, but no punching, kicking, biting, gouging, etc. No drugs, no fucking. If you want to leave, leave now. Once the marathon is under way, nobody can leave until it's over. We're on a ship, going on a voyage out beyond the three mile limit, and nobody can get off.

Everything that happens from then on is spontaneous. Nothing planned beforehand, what will happen at any moment completely unpredictable. And yet, the thing has a rhythm of its own. Each psychodrama has its own natural rhythm and the marathon as a whole has its natural, organic rhythm.

Psychodramas get initiated in a variety of ways. Sometimes Chung starts them, picks on someone, what's happening with you? Starts to probe into them, the necessary scenes of the psychodrama suggest themselves, emerge, are set up. Or Chung will get a cir-

cle of people going and out of the inter-reactions in that, a psychodrama will evolve. Some people just crack spontaneously, their rage, fear, pain get too much, and they are catapulted into their psychodrama. The end of one psychodrama will bring other people crashing down with it and another psychodrama will explode directly out of the last. A conflict between two people suddenly erupts in a corner of the room and has to be dealt with. A girl suddenly goes into hysterical weeping and is brought into the centre of the circle.

It is all real, more real than "real life", because here you follow whatever it is you really feel to wherever it takes you. Defenses, rationalisations, inhibitions, all shattered. What do you really feel? Act it out to the limit. Go with your feelings to wherever they take you. Not acting in the sense of pretence, affectation, artificiality. Anything smacking of this ruthlessly put down. Acting in the sense of doing, expressing, letting yourself be possessed by your feelings, giving yourself up totally to your feelings. Not what you think, not what you wish you felt, but what you feel, what you really feel. No matter how dark, ugly, violent, hateful, shameful, it all has to be expressed, to come out, to be purged, for you to get beyond it.

There's no formal structure. Everything's spontaneous. Anyone can come in at any time, as their feelings move them, to act parts, double, zap. The psychodramas take many different forms. There are confrontations between husbands and wives, acting out of Oedipal situations. Sometimes it's mostly verbal. Other times people slap, wrestle, embrace. People are buried beneath sleeping bags, symbolising their psychic death, and must fight their way free. Symbols, phantasies and dreams are acted out. There are fantastic scenes, a lunatic asylum, a saloon in the Wild West. Anything to get people to the breakthrough place in themselves, to get them out of themselves.

But for all the apparent anarchy, there is a definite rhythm. Each psychodrama follows essentially the same rhythm. It is a stripping away of psychic layers, a going deeper and deeper into the self. You come in wearing a face, but it is not your real face, this bland mask is not your real face. All the psychodrama, the merciless zapping (why do you lie? why are you so weak, so impotent? why are you such a bitch?) all this is designed to strip away the mask and reveal the real face, the face contorted with hatred and rage, the face with all its marks of weakness and shame. The marathon is a true mirror and for once, you must look at your real face. The marathon pushes you right up against the walls of the prison you've built for yourself. It brings you right up against that monster in you, that dragon, that you've never dared do battle with. It takes you into that secret place in yourself, that ultimate fear or shame, that place you do not want to know, that place you cannot confront, but must confront if you are ever to be whole, to be free.

And of course, this involves much terror, panic, anguish. You don't want to look at that face. You run shrieking from it. The psychodrama brings on a terrible crisis, an agony of self-knowledge. There were times when I look around that room and it was like some circle from Dante's Inferno, everyone in Hell, walls running with blood. Curses, tears, screams of rage and pain, people howling and clawing at each other. But what you find is that you can al-

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ways get beyond that place, the dragon can be overcome. That on the other side, there isn't disaster, disintegration, madness, loss of self, but rather self-realisation, strength, wholeness, peace. That underneath that ugly face there is yet another face, your true face, and it is a strong, loving face. After the hell, comes this incredible joy, love and peace. Every psychodrama is this kind of trip into the self, a purgation, a cleansing, a trip through your hell to realise your true humanity.

POSTLOGUE: MAGIC THEATER POSTER COLLAGE

It is possible that he will one day learn to know himself. He may get hold of one of our little magic mirrors. He may encounter one of the Immortals. He may find in one of our magic theatres, the very thing that is needed to free his neglected soul.

Herman Hesse, Steppenwolf.

Magic Theater: Anarchist Evening Entertainment

Husain Chung: Psychodrama Marathon.

This workshop will be a forty hour marathon beginning Friday midnight and ending Sunday afternoon. It will be a continuous, intensive experience in the acting out of emotions and conflicts. Husain Chung calls his approach "psychological karate" because it breaks down intellectualising defenses and intensifies emotional issues in order to increase one's tolerance for conflict, anxiety and frustration. Techniques of rage reduction and inter-personal conflict, which might involve participants in physical contact may be employed. Meals will be served, cat-naps will be allowed. Bring sleeping bags.

TONIGHT AT THE MAGIC THEATER

For Madmen Only

Price of Admittance: Your Mind

On another level we see the native's emotional sensibility exhausting itself in dances which are more or less ecstatic. The native's relaxation takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away. The circle of the dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits. At certain times on certain days, men and women come together at a given place, and there, under the solemn eye of the tribe, fling themselves into a seemingly unorganized pantomime, which is in reality extremely systematic, in which by various means--shakes of the head, bending of the spinal column, throwing of the whole body backward--may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. There are no limits--inside the circle.

The hillock up which you have toiled as if to be nearer the moon; the river bank down which you slip as if to show the connection between the dance and ablutions, cleansing and purification --these are sacred places. There are no limits--for in reality your purpose in coming together is to allow the accumulated libido, the hampered aggressivity, to dissolve as in a volcanic eruption. Symbolical killings, fantastic rites, imaginary mass murders--all must be brought out. The evil humours are undammed, and flow away with a din as of molten lava.

Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth.

Palo Alto Switchboard

Are you interested in setting up a Switchboard in Palo Alto patterned after the Haight-Ashbury Switchboard? There will be an organizational meeting for those people now working in related movement work and those with past organizational experience. The goal is for a self-sustaining, cooperatively-run independent organization working in close alliance with other projects and organizations in the Bay Area. Meeting, TUESDAY, MAY 14 at 330 Cowper, Palo Alto, 7:30 p.m. For more information and volunteering, call Mark or Harris at 327-6293 or 328-7740; Gail Teel at 328-4941 or 325-0115.

The honor of your presence is requested on Sunday, the Twenty-Fifth of May, Nineteen Hundred and Sixty-Nine, Promptly at 12:01 am, at the Oasis Beer Garden, 241 El Camino Real, Menlo Park, upon the occasion of the purchase for

Nicholas Morbey Peyton

with Great Ceremony

His First Legal Beer

By the editor of this newsletter.

Gentlemen of the community only, please.