Out of the Theatres and Into the Streets: Crossing Cultural Borders in the Work of The Living Theatre, 1970-75

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As the tumultuous decade of the 1960s waned for many activists, revolutionary artists faced a series of challenges that would force them to redefine and transform the notion of a counterculture or radical consciousness. In recent years, historians and former activists of the 60s in the U.S. have struggled to identify the numerous conflicts that seemed to subvert the optimistic mythos of the era: assassinations, the election of Richard Nixon, government harassment and arrest of various counterculture figures, America's failure to withdraw from the Vietnam War, deaths from drug overdoses, co-opting of alternative value systems by the mainstream culture, and a sense of growing factionalism within the counterculture.

By the late 1960s, the radical theatre communities of the U.S. and Western Europe were confronting a similar sense of uncertainty about the future, which was marked by the publication of several controversial articles that examined the collapse, failure, or transformation of a number of avant-garde companies. Richard Schechner, a professor at NYU and editor of *TDR*, was also founder of the Performance Group and an influential director of several seminal experimental productions in this era such as *Dionysus in 69*. An outspoken advocate for the avant-garde and the Living Theatre during the 60s, it is ironic that he penned the most provocative and perhaps well known of these essays. Entitled "The Decline and Fall of the (American) Avant-Garde," it charged that relevant political content had seemed to disappear from experimental theatre almost overnight. Schechner cited various causes for this problem, including a decline in subsidies for experimental companies, the collapse of group ensembles due to interpersonal conflict, and a general lack of interest in social activism by the early 1970s (Schechner 1982, 27, 29-30). Interestingly, then, the argument that "the 60s" counterculture self-destructed and/or collapsed from external *and* internal pressures began almost immediately after the end of the decade. Conversely, other activists such

as former Digger and commune member Peter Coyote (today a well-known film actor) charge that the activism of the period, despite some setbacks, left a deep mark on the cultural and political landscape of America.

While this site of ideological contestation over the successes and failures of the era raged throughout the conservative backlash of the Reagan years and continues to the present day, I would argue that critics have often labeled the counterculture in monolithic terms that condemn "the 60s" as "one big drug-induced failure" (Coyote, qtd. in *Flashing on the Sixties*). If one looks farther into the specific and heterogeneous nature of various groups, it becomes clear that many cultural and artistic warriors of the era continued to struggle for a better world well after 1970. This was reflected in the continuation of 60s-era activism through the rise of Feminist, Gay Rights, and environmental causes of the 1970s and beyond (to name just a few), but also via the efforts of many counterculture figures to reconfigure their goals beyond the public and frequently strident acts of protest that characterized the decade. In the realm of theatrical activity, one such company was Julian Beck and Judith Malina's the Living Theatre, whose work shall serve as the focus of my paper. More specifically, my essay will examine Beck's and Malina's departure to Brazil in 1971 and their efforts to create a form of radical politics and aesthetics that could transcend class and cultural boundaries, or, as Malina once said, "reach the working man" (qtd. in Munk 1).

Further criticism about the so-called "failure" of the 60s ethos was specifically hurled at the Living Theatre by critic Richard Gilman in his 1971 essay "Growing Out of the Sixties." Gilman criticized the sixties theatrical current as having been "politicized and placed in the service of a radicalism that sought to affiliate itself" with larger revolutionary agendas, not to mention a tendency towards using theatre as a "means of redemption" (25). For Gilman, the Living Theatre most embodied this trend by delivering a series of lies: namely, by pretending to produce "real" life within a theatre (while pretending it wasn't a theatre) and also pretending not to be performers. Furthermore, he charged that, for all of the "momentary exhilaration" produced by the company's political rhetoric and kinetic interaction with spectators, in the final analysis "the audience wasn't changed" (28).

Both critics' comments reveal a tension that impacted profoundly on the Living Theatre. They were one of the few major U.S. ensembles of the 60s to continue to engage political content in their productions (Peter Schumann's Vermont-based Bread and Puppet Theatre was another; see Ilka Saal's essay in this volume). On the other hand, because of that ongoing activism, they would soon fall out of step with the shifting, "non-politicized" American experimental theater and performance scene of the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, this became especially apparent as the disenchantment Gilman expressed with the political theatre of the day was absorbed into the dominant post-modern avant-garde movements of the post-1960s era. While this transformation of the

American theatre landscape would result in a vitriolic critical assault on the company when they returned to NYC in 1984, it helped push them towards an identity of crisis of sorts that led them to pursue an intercultural agenda in the 1970s. In her article "Thinking About Interculturalism," Bonnie Marranca observed that prominent 60s era artists such as the Living Theatre tended to define "interculturalism as theatrical practice" through work that emphasized social criticism and, frequently, audience participation (14). While I will consider the power dynamics and political implications of intercultural performance later in my essay, I am exploring Malina's and Beck's work in this area in relation to Richard Schechner's position that contact between people and theater artists, especially in the liminal space of live, embodied performance, can make the world a better place. As Schechner puts it, "The translator of culture is not a mere agent, as a translator of words might be, but an actual culture-bearer. This is why performing other cultures becomes so important . . . So that 'them' and 'us' is elided, or laid experientially side-by-side" (Schechner 1991, 314).

Indeed, as the flames of the sixties rebellion seemed to wane at the dawn of the new decade, Julian Beck, Judith Malina, and the Living Theatre did not abandon the cause of radical theatre practice. Instead, they began to realize slowly that they needed to seek a wider global audience for their work, in part agreeing with Gilman's contention that their largely white, middle-class, American audience had not been substantially changed through their productions. Thus, they would soon begin to redefine their conception of, and need for, a conventional theatre audience as they moved into this intercultural arena (indeed, Schechner himself mostly abandoned working in the West, instead choosing to focus his energies on what he saw as the importance of intercultural exchange in the newly emerging field of Performance Studies). A major component of the Living Theatre's departure towards a more global consciousness began with their exposure to the theories of Antonin Artaud in the 1950s, which led them to a radical shift away from literary-based text and language.

"The Living," as they are known in Europe, was actually founded by Beck and Malina in 1947 and is still working today to achieve a non-violent revolution under the leadership of Malina and Hanon Reznikov (who assumed co-artistic duties after Beck's death from cancer in 1985). Their initial work, however, attempted to explore a less commercial, poetic drama as part of the Off-Broadway movement. Their absorption of a European avant-garde influence in this period marked the beginning of a much larger trend towards intercultural work in avant-garde theatre circles that continued through the 60s and beyond. Consequently, they began to experiment with the relationship between performer and spectator with productions like *The Connection* in 1958 and *The Brig* in 1963 (*Signals*). Beck and Malina were greatly influenced by Artaud's notion of affective athleticism or his view that "in our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics

must be made to re-enter our minds" (Artaud 99). Thus, they began to seek an acting style that would replace psychological realism with a physically demanding performance that required an almost sacrificial presence from the actors. Only then would Artaud's cry for a theatre that could "signal through the flames" (Artaud 13) be realized, one that, in Malina's words, could hit the audience "in their bellies as well as their minds" (qtd. in Goldfarb 17). Since Artaud also wanted the spectator "placed in the middle of the action … filling all four corners of the room" (Artaud 56), it was perhaps inevitable for the Living to redefine the actor-spectator relationship. Their goal was to achieve a visceral audience response, but for the purpose of promoting their own newly emerging anarchist-pacifist political agenda. As Beck put it, "We wanted a theatre that would be an intense experience halfway between dreams and rituals, through which the viewer could achieve intimate comprehension of himself…and the nature of things" (qtd. in *Uptown Dispatch* 11).

As their interest in anarchist politics grew in this period, their aesthetic exploration of Artaud's ideas allowed them to increasingly rethink the notion of political theatre in a different context. Malina had been greatly influenced by her studies with the German director and political activist Erwin Piscator at the New School for Social Research in NYC during the 1940s. Her and Beck's discovery of Artaud, however, allowed them and the burgeoning Living Theatre ensemble to move away from a language based approach to production and to synthesize politics and theatre around the expression of the body in performance. After the American IRS convicted the Becks of tax evasion, they fled to Europe with their company in 1964 to begin their so-called "exile" period. While overseas, they continued to develop what was to become their signature performance style by living communally, gathering an international and multi-lingual ensemble of performers, and experimenting with various techniques over a lengthy, unstructured rehearsal period. The result of their spiritual and artistic wanderings was the creation of four collectively created performance pieces: *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, *Frankenstein*, *Antigone*, and *Paradise Now*. *Mysteries*, the first of these works, premiered in October 1964 as a free-form collage of various sound-and-movement exercises, yoga postures, agit-prop sketches, and improvised lighting and music. Each of these productions eschewed literary dramaturgy in favor of a highly kinetic, ritualistically choreographed performance style that incorporated fragmented text, a multi-layered use of sound, and an international cadre of performers (who made up for a lack of formal acting technique and polish with raw presence and vitality).

Furthermore, the Living Theatre company became well-known for engaging, if not confronting, its audience in a direct and aggressive manner regarding the political dimensions of their productions. While in Europe, they also served as proselytizers of the new radical politics and theatre while playing to packed houses. Indeed, they were even involved with the demonstrations organ-

ized by radicalized students in Paris, which resulted in the takeover of the Odéon Théâtre during 1968. Later that year, the Living brought these four seminal works of the 1960s radical theatre scene to the U.S., with their sprawling, multi-tiered *Paradise Now* perhaps achieving the most attention and notoriety. Such controversy was most likely a result of several sections where the spectators essentially created the "play" in tandem with the Living's actors, including an infamous one called "The Rite of Universal Intercourse" where willing audience members took off their clothes to engage the ensemble in a communal exploration of "liberated" bodies in space. Given the company's desire for the performance to end with a collective euphoria that would lead the audience out of the theatre to demand "paradise now," this play was perhaps the ultimate demonstration to date of their reliance on the body to represent political action (Biner 196).

As a result of this high-profile touring in Europe and the U.S., by 1969 they were arguably the most famous theatre company in the West. In addition, they were equally exhausted and disillusioned by the growing impatience with non-violent protest that permeated the various radical movements they encountered across America. The pacifist Becks were also perceived in some radical political circles as out of touch with the socio-political climate of the late 1960s. Indeed, while performing in Berkeley in 1968 amidst various anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, their optimism in the possibilities of a "paradise now" without direct political action was labeled naive, if not irresponsible, by some local activists (Neff 1970, 195-201). Consequently, in looking back at the era, the Becks evaluated their work as unfinished by the end of the 1960s (Gelber 24-25), since many activists had rejected their message of non-violent agitation. This sense of political failure was accompanied by a growing personal dissatisfaction with the artifice of "performing" in theatres for mostly middle-class audiences, regardless of the radical nature of the ideologies exchanged with those spectators. The economic and aesthetic pressures of such status, in tandem with the increasing violence of 60s-era radical politics (e.g., The Weathermen), led the company to rethink its current direction. The result of this self-analysis was a decision to renounce playing in traditional theatre spaces in order to explore the connection between life and art or "living theatre" in the streets, hospitals, asylums, prisons, etc., of the world. In doing so, they hoped to reach a new "audience" and more directly affect the lives of various politically disenfranchised communities and individuals (Gelber 23-26).

By the end of their tour in 1968, the Becks were seeking a more direct means of action in order to bring about social change (although they have never stopped debating the challenges inherent in the balance of functioning as political activists and artists). In addition, Beck and Malina became increasingly blunt about their dissatisfaction with the institutional pressures of having to support a large company, which in part was necessitated by their need to tour because of the public demand to see their work. For

example, when critic and Living Theatre advocate Arthur Sainer visited the company in Geneva in February of 1968, he found them reluctantly preparing to travel to Sicily to give yet another performance of their repertory. When Sainer suggested that they cancel the booking, Beck's response was as follows: "Arthur, we have to go somewhere. We have no home. We have to make our bread. We're expected there. There's a roof for us. We have no choice" (Sainer 1997, 295). In a sense, Beck and Malina felt that the Living had outgrown its purpose as a collective that had become too splintered in pursuit of varying or conflicting radical aesthetic and political agendas. Thus, they sought to redefine themselves in a way that would reconcile their internal and external questioning of the means of structuring ideological issues of class, gender, race, and international relations. To accomplish such goals, the Becks had to streamline the company and focus on less overtly theatrical, intercultural work.

The immediate catalyst for this ideological shift occurred during their residency in Morocco during the summer of 1969. The infighting had reached crisis proportions, which Living Theatre veteran Henry Howard described as revolving around the fact that "the whole company has thirty political ideologies" towards implementing revolution (Tytell 269-270). What was perhaps a common ground between the clashing worldviews of the company was their decade-long exploration of the synthesis between life and art (hence "The Living Theatre") via their experiments in communal living as a means of crafting a more collaborative, ritualistic, almost tribal means of production. In addition, their pursuit of Artaud's emphasis on achieving the transcendental through a visceral theatre rooted in the voice and body (again, "through the skin"), as well as absorbing an amalgam of intercultural ideologies, texts, and rituals (such as the *I Ching*, Marxism, Native-American rites, etc.) into their performances pointed the way towards a kind of theatre that could potentially move beyond a specific cultural mindset or communication system. No doubt these factors contributed to their interest in the transcendental rites of a local nomadic tribe called the Gnaoua and led to creating a work-in-progress with them called *Saturation City*. Members of the Gnaoua met with the company daily to perform ceremonies and teach some of the Living Theatre actors rituals like "how to stick knives in their flesh in a trance state without drawing blood" (Tytell 268). The Living planned to visit various cities or smaller villages in Morocco and perform the play in public spaces such as plazas, schoolyards, market places, etc. The Moroccan authorities, already distrustful of the "hippies," quickly threw the Living out of the country once it became obvious that they intended to interact with locals for the purpose of "leading people into action within the plays" (Tytell 267-268). This experience was a major turning point for the company as a core group led by Malina and Beck now sought a more direct participatory role in contributing to the radical and increasingly global notion of a counterculture revolution. For this to happen, they would need to seek an artistic and political path geo-

graphically and culturally located in a specific community. As Beck was to conclude several months later while working with a newly formed Living Theatre "action cell" in Paris, "We don't need plays, we need action . . . the people learn through action" (Beck 38). Indeed, by 1971 he would go so far as to say, "From this point on the revolutionary rhetoric only serves to fritter away the frenzy; it becomes an excuse not to act" (Ibid. 215).

The Moroccan experience thus spurred the dissolution of the larger formal institution known as the Living Theatre. They formally split into four cells with varying degrees of political and artistic focus via a well-publicized press release called the "Living Theatre Action Declaration." This document concludes that the "man in the street" had no real interest in attending the theatre, and urged the following: "Abandon the theatres. Create other circumstances for the man in the street. Create circumstances that will lead to Action, which is the highest form of theatre we know. Create action. Find new forms….Art is confined in the jail of the Establishment's mentality. That's how art is made to function to serve the needs of the Upper Class. If art can't be used to serve the needs of the people, get rid of it" (Ryder 1974,10). In short, the Living Theatre was no longer interested in trying to spreads its anarchist-pacifist message to ticket buyers of all classes in the "bourgeois palace" of the traditional theatre (Sainer 1985, 57). One contingent, led by Rufus Collins, focused on pursuing individual enlightenment as a means of global amelioration and headed to India. Another group focused more on aesthetic issues and settled in London, while a third cell advocated a militant, violent position that focused on "liberating" comrades in the so-called "Third World." The Becks led yet a fourth "direct action" cell whose first major site of political exploration was Brazil, where they eventually merged with the above-mentioned "Marxist" splinter group spearheaded by former Living Theatre actor Carl Einhorn. This new journey attempted to create political action and "new forms" by seeking direct contact with Brazilian "workers" who traditionally had little or no interest in the idea of attending "theatre" (Tytell 270-271; Munk 92). Their transitional period involved a brief residency in Paris, where their action cell read and discussed various radical manifestoes, including literature of the Black Panther Party for Self-defense. This led Beck to argue to the group that art was only useful in its ability to expose a pragmatic truth that made it "clear to everyone what has to be done and how to do it" (qtd. in Tytell 274). Such theoretical speculation served to create even more interest within their action cell to conceptualize revolutionary activity in international, global terms.

Thus, the groundwork for an intercultural mission was well laid when they met Brazilian film maker and activist Ze Celso, who was visiting Paris. Celso piqued their interest by describing the crackdown on political theatre by the military-backed repressive authorities there, claiming that his production of Brecht's *Galileo* had been shut down by right-wing paramilitary commandos. After his return to Brazil, he sent a letter to the Becks inviting them to bring

their work and emerging ideology to the poor mining and settlement communities of his country. While in Paris, the Becks had been disillusioned by a recent wave of university-based violence there and at home in the U.S. (precipitated by the shooting of four anti-war student protestors at Kent State University by members of the Ohio National Guard), as well as the seeming co-opting of counterculture ideas in the commercially successful film of the Woodstock concert. Thus, they and their cell welcomed the opportunity to challenge the "establishment" in a new cultural environment and set off for Brazil (Tytell 274-277; Ryan 1974, 12).

The Becks' latest project, the aforementioned *Legacy of Cain*, was a further evolution of the Morocco-based work and drew on the writings and sado-masochistic explorations of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the 19th-century novelist. In tandem with Gilberto Freyre's history of Brazil, *The Master and the Slave*, they crafted a play structure that expressed the idea that the power of sadistic leaders came from masochism of the oppressed masses. Beck was drawn to the Artaudian notion of pain and "the great scream" as a means of breaking through the numbness and social conditioning of modern industrial life (*Signals*; Tytell 285). For the ever-optimistic Beck, the masochist "identified with the slave class," but such a social construct could lead to revolution and profound class changes if the "slaves" could be made aware of this conditioning. As scholar Joe Roach notes, Michel Foucault often argued that, in modern history, "power touches people's lives through social and cultural practices" rather than "through centralized state organizations or systems of belief" (101). As early as the 18th century, new "technologies" could be used to diffuse power at the "capillary" level to show, as Foucault himself stated, "how power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth" (186). If conceived correctly, the new Living Theatre "could openly inspire the proletariat, the poor, the poorest of the poor" in Brazil (qtd. in Tytell 277) and begin to implement the theoretical premises of its "action declaration" (Tytell 278-285; Ryan 1971, 12; Munk 91-97). Given the rapid proliferation of technology and industry in the post-modern climate of the late 20th century, the interpersonal dimensions of power, sex, and bodies had indeed become increasingly complex and ripe concerns for the Living Theatre.

Once in Brazil, the core group of Living Theatre actors continued to learn Portuguese and explore the communities where they might begin to encounter "the workers." Only five or six parts and several performances of *The Legacy of Cain* were created before the company's arrest by Brazilian authorities in the town of Ouro Preto on July 1, 1970. They began to work by sending out teams of Living Theatre actors, accompanied by Portuguese speakers (a small group of Brazilian students had joined the company after they conducted workshops at several universities), to meet with the people of Ouro Preto street by street based on a map drawn by Pierre Biner. Members of the community were interviewed about the nature of their work, dependency on and feelings about money, etc. This research and direct probing of their intended audience

was called "The Campaign" and was continued as an integral part of the Living's interaction in various new (and sometimes hostile) communities in subsequent years. Indeed, the ensemble members met for four hours a day to discuss their findings, viewing this direct interaction with the local community as equal in importance to creating theatre pieces with them. Thus, as an extension of this intercultural research prior to the creation of any actual performances, the Living's actors sought out concrete ways to gain the trust of various community factions. Since they were perceived by most locals as outsiders, Westerners, and actors who did not "work" for a living, such community outreach efforts were crucial to the company's mission. Consequently, they pursued tasks like teaching yoga to prisoners in a local jail and sharing "breathing exercises" with members of a nearby sports club and junior high. Interestingly, the Living later employed a similar strategy of community integration in Pittsburgh, as the work in Brazil had convinced them of the validity of their theories about class structure as well as the possibility of improving the workers' lives within those hierarchical structures (Tytell 294-297).

While this information gathering helped shape the Living's long-term thoughts about the purpose of *The Legacy of Cain*, the individual plays themselves were to be created with the subjects of their interviews. Company member Steven Ben-Israel described the methodology and content of two of these short plays, *Christmas Cake for the Hot Hole and the Cold Hole* and *Rituals and Visions of Transformations* (part of what the Living called *Favela Project Number 1*) as follows:

> These were plays without words, done in an Artaudian style, ritualistically and repetitiously…. They are movement, sound, and gesture. This had the advantage of avoiding censorship. One play ended with a cake that we had baked that was six feet long and four feet wide. At the end of the piece, it was eaten by the people who had seen the show in the square. The frosting on top of the cake was a replica of the Brazilian monetary note—the cruzerio. The reaction of the people was ecstatic. Since we were also researching *The Legacy of Cain*, we felt that we had to be invited to their houses and to talk to them. As one studies a character in a play, we were studying the character of these people (Ryan 1971, 23).

Rituals and Visions of Transformations was an equally improvisational and collaborative project. Performed in the city of Embo, it began with a slow processional march towards the town square. The marchers consisted of Living Theatre actors and about fifty Brazilian theatre students. This event involved indirect participation with the people of the town during the processional, as Ben-Israel commented that they gave spectators the "look of *I and*

Thou," which was a rite from *Paradise Now* that led to the "union of two persons" (Ryan 1971, 23). While the brain is the source of power within this rite, the "command for action" came from the "guru" of "the man in the street" (Ibid. 23). The Becks later dismissed *Paradise Now* as a work performed for the "bourgeois intelligentsia" (Munk 96), but their incorporation of this rite from the play seemed to speak directly to this desire to "drop out" of the theatres and "work specifically with children, with students, with very poor people and people who work in factories"—that is, the "man in the street" (Ben-Israel qtd. in Sainer 1997, 251). By essentially telling the spectators that power or empowerment resided within their own bodies and minds, the Living Theatre actors were attempting to break through the social and political conditioning that they saw as the basis for the class inequality plaguing Brazil at that time. *Visions* ended with the procession arriving in a square filled with about 2,000 people and the Living Theatre performers taking up positions at six different stations, all within close proximity of the townspeople. The non-verbal, sound-and-movement driven playlets were then enacted to engage general subjects such as "the State, Property, War, Love, Money, and Death….In the end, there was a transformation with all the actors tied up in ropes or chains. We tied ourselves up in as sexual a manner as our imaginations could invent. Eventually, the people watching the play unchained us and we all joined in a musical Chord of Liberation" (Living qtd. in Ryan 1971, 23-24).

Seeking further opportunities to demonstrate the possibilities of political engagement and empowerment to the Brazilian workers, the company next turned to the relationship they had developed at the previously mentioned middle school in the town of Saramenha. The school's leadership asked them to develop a performance with the students to celebrate Mother's Day, which led to the creation of the *Mother Day's Play* (Tytell 295). According to Ben-Israel, the idea for the piece emerged from the Living's initial desire to work with younger grammar- and high-school-aged students and to help them rethink their current educational system. Initially focusing on the area of physical education, they tried to steer the students away from competitive games by utilizing breathing techniques and sound-and-movement exercises from the radical repertory. The hope was to teach them a "common language" that could be used to create a play once their specific needs and problems were explored and identified through a new "game structure" that the Living hoped would "add some credibility and some value to their bodies and lives" (Sainer 1997, 250-51). The *Mother's Day Play* itself involved around 150 students who were asked to write about their mothers and general dreams, which were then edited into a specific play structure involving ten dreams (entitled "Ten Dreams About Mother"). These were rehearsed for about ten days with the Living Theatre actors through the "common language" of the theatre games and exercises. In Ben-Israel's description of the event, they used "the ten dreams about mother to find, in terms of our study, what the relationship [is] between child and mother in this

society. Is the relationship a creative, positive one or is it a destructive one?" (qtd. in Ibid. 254).

For the Living Theatre, what emerged from this exploration was a clear sense of the destructive relationships that mirrored class tensions in the larger society, which again reinforced their notions about Artaud, Sacher-Masoch, etc. vis-à-vis Brazilian political and socio-economic systems. Thus, a performance was created and enacted that spoke to the roles of parents (especially mothers) and children as part of a web of larger human social relationships in need of change. Ultimately, their hope was to get the mothers to place the specific needs of their own children in a more collective context that addressed "a growing thing that needs to be dealt with very sensitively if we don't want to create more slaves" (Ben-Israel qtd. in Ibid.). The performance of the dreams ended with each child being "attached" to his or her mother with crepe paper and literally being "flown" around the room by others. Ben-Israel noted that most of the parents were poor, black, and first-time theater goers. They encountered the voyage of their children's dreams through an interactive performance experience that incorporated movement, noise, and drumming, with all of them staying afterwards to discuss the event. True, the project did not create a conventional material text that could be represented in the future. Nonetheless, Ben-Israel characterized the event and the larger *Legacy of Cain* cycle as successful because such work created a genuine dialogue with the local community. Furthermore, its reception might be "understood by the body and stored there for future and immediate action" (qtd. in Ibid. 254-255).

In an interview with Erika Munk after their return to the U.S., Beck and Malina similarly assessed their goals and results in relation to the Brazilian project. Both were very much aware of the potentially condescending nature of the cultural and economic gap between themselves and the peoples of the Brazilian *favelas*. In Malina's words,

> The whole problem is to find some sort of communication that isn't pedantic, that doesn't say, "Well, I have a very interesting theory, and I am generously bringing it to you, poor ignorant people." This trap exists all of the time. Can we instead go to the people and say to them, "We have some skills and you have a community with problems, a social class with problems, a world with problems—is there any way our skills can be useful to you?" We approach a group of people …and we try to learn…what troubles in their life stem specifically from our world—a world we know pretty well, a world that we reject, a world of which they are the victims. We come from the executioners and we approach the victims. We have to find out what our confrontation with them is, given our relationship, given our economic

> inequality, our class privileges. We have to find out what's possible. It's an enormous question. There is a profound gap that can't be totally overcome on an individual human level, but the nature of our approach is such that it can overcome much of this distance because the work itself stands for community, the process of work creates community. (Malina qtd. in Munk 92).

Her comments reveal the extent to which the Living Theatre was honestly attempting to wrestle with the struggle between what Beck referred to as, "radical politics and radical aesthetics" (Ibid.) and an attempt to redefine this relationship in the post-1960s era. Indeed, in *The Life of The Theatre*, much of which was written from his jail cell in Brazil, Beck recalled feeling initially uncertain and unequipped to negotiate the unknown peoples and cultural terrain of Brazil. Such feelings made him nostalgic for the days when the "stoned" Living Theatre traveled in buses, playing for appreciative, and paying, audiences who thanked them profusely. By 1971, though, Beck would argue that "nostalgia is reactionary" and acknowledged the need for, and feeling of liberation created by, his efforts to transform poetry into action amidst the physical squalor of Brazil (157, 218-219). Despite the obstacles created by the intercultural dimensions of the Living's work in Brazil, their comments above indicate a significant alteration in their own cultural worldview and perceptions of the purpose and form of theatrical activity. Thus, their communication and collaboration with the people encountered in the streets of Brazil radically altered the way in which they approached their art well into the 1980s, and to the present day in subtler forms.

During their stay in Brazil, however, their major obstacle revolved around the actual form in which direct interaction with various disenfranchised communities could occur. In this instance, the aesthetic nature of working politically through theatrical techniques with a class of people for whom art or theatre had very little personal resonance was compounded by lack of a common language and various cultural barriers. In her article "Transculturating Transculturation," Diana Taylor discusses theories of transculturation in relation to theatrical praxis, analyzing how the notion of culture and its reflection of national identity becomes politicized and raises questions of power and empowerment when various cultures collide. As she contends, "The issue in transculturation, then, is not only one of meaning (what do symbols mean in different contexts). It is also one of political positioning and selection: which forms, symbols, or aspects of cultural identity become highlighted or confrontational, when and why" (91). Taylor notes that the term itself was first used by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to comprehend "the loss or displacement of a society's culture due to the acquisition or imposition of foreign material, and the fusion of the indigenous and the foreign to create a new, original cultural product" (Ibid. 91). Ortiz's model rejected a binary

approach towards analyzing the co-existence and intermingling of two cultural systems in favor of a more complex paradigm. For Ortiz, the notion of transculturation acknowledged the potential for cultural acquisition (i.e., acculturation), cultural loss (i.e., disculturation), and the "subsequent creation of new cultural phenomena (i.e., neoculturation)" in this process of exchange (Ibid., 92). The Becks' mission in Brazil, then, was essentially a transcultural one where they sought to use theatrical practice and aesthetics to create a new cultural system or product of sorts.

As her essay progresses, Taylor discusses the work of several indigenous Latin American theorists and artists (e.g., José María Arguedas in Peru) who engaged these concepts to reveal the power relationships inherent within transculturation. Thus, Taylor cites Arguedas's contention that while both dominant and dominated power groups are changed through intercultural contact, it would be disingenuous to say that the exchange is equal in power or even necessarily reciprocal. In short, "[w]e must not minimize very significant imbalances in the crossing of cultural borders: conquest, colonialism, imperialism, tourism, or scholarly researchers. There is no dialogue insofar as the word connotes equality and give-and-take, in intercultural perspectives or expressions. It is clear that for all the First World 'interest' and research in the Third World, the Third World knows significantly more about First World culture than the other way around" (Ibid. 93). In this regard, the theory of transculturation allows for a traditionally marginalized culture to insert itself into the discourse and potentially impact on the dominant culture in a "circulating pattern of cultural transference" (Ibid.). While the Becks and the Living Theatre were certainly well intentioned in their work with the residents of the Brazilian *favelas*, they were also crossing cultural borders from a position of First World privilege and power. The result of their residency in Brazil did not solely involve the Living's success in empowering or changing the workers, but also in how this intercultural exchange created a new transcultural model that altered the way they would continue to approach art and politics.

Furthermore, as the theme of this volume of *Works and Days* suggests, the radical ideas of the Becks and the Living were not merely engaged on a conceptual level. In contrast, they were explored on a material level of action and direct physical engagement that forged a new means of communicative discourse, with the creation of text very much a part of this work. As Beck wrote while in Brazil, " The work of the theatre as the liberation of dreams: the transformation of ideas into working acts…. We cannot survive without hope therefore we cannot survive without the imagination. This has to do with the work of unleashing the imagination of the people" (149). For instance, Malina observed that the procession of the *Rituals and Visions favela* play asked a number of simple questions, not unlike the agit-prop statements of *Paradise Now*, involving subjects such as the nature of state, property, life, love, hunger, pleasure, etc. Whereas the tone of this engagement was mostly didactic and hostile in the plays performed for middle class audiences in

theatres during the 1960s, this changed considerably in the Living's intercultural encounter and exchange in Brazil. For Malina, the questions and dialogue raised by the *Legacy of Cain* created a "real," more truthful exchange at the end of the event. By engaging the themes of enslavement and violence in the cycle, they hoped to express "possible alternatives in a variant situation or a variant location or a variant class" (qtd. in Munk 94). The Becks equally hoped to avoid utopian idealism but continued to have faith in the Brecht-influenced notion that spectators would come home from observing (and, in the case of Brazil, participating in) the theatrical event and discuss it. This, in turn, might alter their consciousness and create an awareness—the first step towards concrete social change within the nature of Marxian/Brechtian dialectics—about their long-standing feelings of resignation as "the eternal poor" (Munk 93, 94-95; Willet 170-171). The result of such intercultural exchange also helped to expand the global consciousness of the larger radical currents of the 1960s. In Brazil, while a literal language-based text of sorts was created, the improvisational and collective "scripting" of the theatrical discourse (especially given the kinetic, Artaudian-driven nature of the Living's theatrical vocabulary) grounded *The Legacy of Cain* cycle in a much larger performative frame. Thus, the Living utilized tools of exchange that transcended oral and written communication in a way that impacted on their subsequent work in Brooklyn and Pittsburgh and further reflected Taylor's ideas about "circulating patterns of cultural transference" (93).

In an interview for the documentary *Flashing on the Sixties*, the influential acting teacher Viola Spolin speaks of the "never-ending spiral" of playing in the perpetual present as performers and life-actors. The Living's short stay in Brazil was abruptly ended by the intervention of Brazilian authorities. As in Morocco, the presence of the outsider Western "hippies" was only tolerated within certain boundaries by the existing totalitarian regimes. Once they sought a direct means of communication with local constituencies based on the body as a new—and potentially subversive—means of global, intercultural communication, the Living were quickly arrested and expelled. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1971, however, the nascent ideas of *The Legacy of Cain* and the new style of direct, interactive techniques forged in the *favelas* of Brazil were incorporated into their next project. In a sense, then, it represented a continuing spiral of their own evolving sensibility of how to merge radical politics and art, as well as a provocative and long-reaching cross-fertilization across cultures and continents. While the Living's initial intercultural work served as a vector of ideas to Brazil, the synthesis of that experimentation provided an additional vector to the U.S. regarding the cultural, capillary, embodied class struggle of the Brazilian people. The result was an ongoing discourse across national boundaries that would significantly alter the Living's perception of class and cultural politics and move them towards engaging the working classes of Pittsburgh.

After initially touring American universities upon returning from

Brazil, the Becks created a new work entitled *Seven Meditations on Political Sadomasochism*. The play explored the various themes of *The Legacy of Cain* through chants learned from the Gnaoua tribesman in Morocco and an amalgam of dense radical, political texts ranging from Bakunin to Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul On Ice*. The most disturbing aspect of the play was a speculation on the injustice of torture in repressive regimes, including a recreation of how Brazilian Living Theatre member Ivanildo Silvino Araujo was tortured with an army field generator during the company's Brazilian imprisonment (Tytell 314-316). This transitional piece and the concerns of the Brazil project were further developed during a residency in Brooklyn in 1973, where the reorganized Living Theatre lived communally and engaged in lengthy ideological discussions among its various "cells."

The company had utilized Russian avant-garde director Vsevelod Meyerhold's theory of Biomechanics in earlier productions such as *Frankenstein*, but they began to explore his method in depth in this period as yet another possible solution to their desire to create a theatrical praxis rooted in the body. This, in turn, could be communicated directly to people working in the maw of "real life" beyond the realm of matrixed, formal theatrical space and time. These techniques were based on Meyerhold's study of the movements and use of time and space among factory workers as a model for a kind of disciplined, non-superfluous acting system based on a series of physical actions that could elicit an emotional response (Worrall 14-34; Strasberg 106-121). Thus, the Living seized upon his notion of the theatre as a kind of "factory" as the basis of a performance style that could best convey the thematic concerns of their new work *The Money Tower*. The piece was staged on a literal, forty-foot high tower that was topped with a neon dollar sign. An actual moving elevator transported material—mostly money—up the various levels of scaffolding that represented the strata and clashes of the social class system.

Paul Ryder Ryan extensively documented the rehearsal process for this project in the June 1974 *TDR*, in which Beck says, "This piece…is aimed at depicting the conversion of ore into money. It's principally directed at the coal miner and steel worker" and was intended to be performed on site at the gates of actual factories (Ryder 1974, 13). In this regard, the company saw the production as a further examination of the kinds of work that evolved from their "Campaign" interaction with workers at the nexus sites of economic, capillary exchange in the Brazilian mining and *favela* communities. Beck described the three sections of the play as follows:

> The first section tries to depict the social structure and how it is governed by the economic flow. We watch each class go through its cycle….We have a section in which the people on top are singing of billions of dollars, while at the same time the establishment puppets below are singing of mil-

> lions, the middle class of thousands, the workers, and police of dollars and pennies. . . . The second section of the play . . . deals with how the visions of the poor and the working class are the nightmares of the rich. . . . This is a complex moment in that we attempt to give certain flashes of social vision and hope for change while at the same time we see people destroying each other. . . . Then, we examine the revolutionary possibilities of a system, or rather a non-system (anarchistic at its core) that functions without money. That's the end of this play (qtd. in Ryan 1974, 16).

While the play was very ritualistic and highly choreographed, it also included a written scenario/text to enhance their larger performance strategy of erecting the money tower and enacting the local workers' class conflicts within a larger global, intercultural context. For example, in section one, the ensemble performed the *Micro-Opera of Class Distinction*, where "the poor" chanted lines such as, "This is the house that money built. One class on top of another. Many on bottom. Few on top. No place to go but around" (Living Theatre Collective 21). Overall, the Living's attempts to establish a rapport with the disenfranchised workers of Pittsburgh was conceived as one more ongoing facet of the *Legacy of Cain* and thus was linked directly to their Brazilian project and, on a more theoretical level, their interactions with the Gnaoua in Morocco.

Although *The Money Tower* was first presented in Brooklyn, the company was running out of funds to stay in NYC when it received a Mellon grant to support a residency in Pittsburgh. This led to the creation of a new play, *Six Public Acts*, which was performed in tandem with *The Money Tower* there in the summer of 1975. The Living was now divided into two "cells": the more militant Lucha group and the Joy contingent led by the Becks and Hanon Reznikov, who had joined the company after their return from Brazil. As in Morocco, Paris, and Brazil, the Living's survival as a company was predicated on their ability to create new solutions or possible methods in bringing the continuous *Legacy of Cain* cycle to "workers" based in yet another uncharted and culturally specific environment. Consequently, growing differences in methodology soon emerged that recalled the internal discord of the late 1960s. For instance, the Lucha group challenged the Becks' leadership and insisted on collective decision-making, which perhaps reflected the cell's leanings towards Maoist politics and sympathy for violent revolutionary tactics.

When the two factions finally split during the cold winter months of 1975, the Becks' Joy cell continued the research of the "Campaign" that had been such an integral part of their work in Brazil. While in Pittsburgh, their preparations took the form of video interviews with steelworkers and coal miners and the development of a local food cooperative. Eventually, some members of

the Joy cell even joined a local citizens' police committee (Tytell 317-322; Ryan 1974, 12-18). The Becks hoped to open a dialogue with a wide variety of community members in Pittsburgh, including policemen and their families. Their ultimate hope was to not attack the police as "pigs," as was done in the 1960s, but to show the "individual policeman…that he is, in fact, a worker with the aspirations and dreams of his class; that in any confrontation with his brother workers he should side with them and not with his superiors" (Ryan 1974, 19). In all instances, their efforts reflected the transcultural influence of their previous work abroad to locate the possibilities of political and social change in the currency of the body or organic, capillary functions.

As with previous geographical residencies, the Living was least successful in altering the reception of the local authorities as representatives of national and international authoritarian systems. While performing *The Money Tower* at the US Steel Building, they were once again arrested, although the play was eventually performed at seven locations in Pittsburgh (including the Homestead Steel Plant and the Jones and Laughlin Steel Mill). As American citizens, though, they were not expelled from the country in this instance. Consequently, this brief imprisonment did not greatly impede their larger efforts to implement stateside the shift in their radical philosophy that had begun in Brazil by directly engaging disenfranchised workers on the streets and in their own neighborhoods. With *Six Public Acts*, however, they overtly critiqued and confronted the established power structures of American society. Modeling their performance on a medieval mystery play, the Living Theatre actors moved with the audience as the play was presented at six different public sites around the city (Tytell 322-323). For instance, when Arthur Sainer observed the play in June of 1975, an actor announced, "We propose to visit six places where the power of Cain is felt and to enact there public acts in the name of the people's pain" (Sainer 1997, 299). The local telephone company represented the "House of Death," where actors piled up the shoes of "victims" of the state while shouting, "Why do we die so soon? Who decrees it? Who were Cain and Abel and why did one kill the other? Why are we ruled by violence?" The local Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School symbolized the "House of the State," with several spectators joining in a ritual of smearing blood on the flagpole to indict "the System" for violent actions. In addition, Mellon Bank represented the "House of Money"; nearby high-rise projects the "House of Property." A visit to a local police precinct (the "House of War" on that evening's performance) almost led to the company's arrest for performing after midnight and without a permit. The Living was pursued by the police despite continuing the performance several blocks away, but was eventually able to convince the "sheepish" officers to accept roses and engage in a public dialogue (Ibid. 299-300).

With the exception of the interaction with the police, most of these "public acts" seemed to place the spectator in an observatory role that was more passive than in most of the *favela* projects.

This changed, however, with the concluding "House of Love," section, as the actors literally bound each other at one a.m. after positing these questions: "How does property bind? How does the state bind? . . . Who cracks the whips? How do we undo the knots? Without violence?" The actors then waited in the cold until the forty or so remaining spectators, who were thus transformed into "performers," released them and then continued the dialectic engendered by the production at 2:00 a.m. over food and hot drink in the Living's nearby communal kitchen (Ibid. 300-301). In this regard, *Six Public Acts* continued the kind of ritualistic action based in the body or "through the skin" that was created with local workers in Brazil during *Rituals and Visions* in 1970. These rites were then followed by the kind of direct, interpersonal dialogue (over food and drink, thereby grounding their praxis yet again in the body) that had successfully crossed class and cultural boundaries in the *favela* projects and *Mother's Day Play* (Ryan 1971, 23-24; Sainer 1997, 250-255).

The Living returned to Europe shortly thereafter in 1975 to accept a new residency, but the influence of their exchange with diverse ethnographic, socio-political, and cultural communities ranging from Morocco to Brazil to the industrial, urban enclaves of Pittsburgh continued. The Becks and their ever-evolving ensemble of multi-lingual, international actors revised and performed *Seven Meditations and Six Public Acts* in Italy and France during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and continued their quest to engage "workers, soldiers, women, oppressed kids" in public, "real life" venues (Beck, qtd. in Sainer 1997, 302). Overall, their work in this period involved approximately ten years based in Italy and France where they continued to explore forms of direct theatrical engagement outside conventional boundaries of theatrical space all over Europe. This eventually included a foray into Poland behind the "Iron Curtain" in 1980 which Malina described afterwards as "feeling on the brink of some new step … it's a whole cultural turnover that's about to happen" (qtd. in Amitin, 39). When they did return to performing in formal theatres during the 1980s, Malina and Reznikov still chose to locate their "permanent theatre" in a neighborhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that was considered poor, dangerous, drug-ridden, and difficult to reach (it was closed because of fire code violations in 1993; Solomon 88). In addition, they never stopped offering performances in the streets of New York (e.g., *Tumult, Or Clearing the Streets* in 1990) or while on tour in Europe (Living Theatre Season Brochure 1990-91).

The unconventional location of their NYC-based space was not particularly good for box-office, but it certainly reflected the "global consciousness" spawned out of their experimental work in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Living operated their converted storefront theatre as a resource for the local community as well as a performance site, with Malina contending, "The Lower East Side has a level of reality. It's got all the horrors, but it also has the poetry of real life, and I think that's where the Living Theatre should be" (qtd. in Neff 1988, 27). In 1985, Sainer aptly summarized the Living's

journey in this period by claiming that "[t]he Becks *appear* to be working in the theater because they are using modes that seem recognizable to theatre goers, but in fact for years they have not been working in theater as much as they have been working out of it" (56). The Living Theatre is currently in residence at the Centro Living Europa near Milan, Italy, with recent productions including an ongoing piece called *Not in My Name*. This interactive street-theatre play protests capital punishment and is continually presented in public sites (e.g., Times Square) of various nations on days where executions are scheduled in the U.S. Another major current project, *Capital Changes*, explores the class impact of the emergence of Western capitalism between 1400 and 1800 and draws upon their tradition of working within, as they put it, "the political theatre of Piscator and Brecht" (the Living Theatre Website, February 2002).

In conclusion, many activists and artists of the 1960s redefined, rather than abandoned, their goals and methodologies in subsequent years. Essentially, the radical sensibility of the era became more integrated, or burrowed deeper, into the cultural fabric of various societies after 1970, including the US. Many of these currents involved a shift away from large-scale public gatherings and the kind of high-profile vocal rhetoric that characterized the radical movements of the 60s. Instead, what emerged was a more grass-roots, community-based, and globally oriented activism that required radicals interested in long-term change to find a system of communication that transcended speech-making in favor of a body politic rooted in a direct currency of communicative exchange. As 60s activist Peter Coyote argues,

> The establishment would like to pretend that nothing has changed, that the hippies have all cut their hair and 'grown up' into chic consumers. This is the same propagandistic impulse to reduce the complex politics of the sixties into tasteless jewelry, peace symbols, and bell-bottom pants…. Our victories occurred in the deep waters of culture and not the frothy white water of current events, so they rarely surface in the media, which is such a dominant factor in establishing public reality. The way people view health issues, the environment, human rights, spirituality, agriculture, women, and consciousness itself has been redefined by my generation (349).

The way people define community and cultural borders, boundaries, and individual and national identities has also changed significantly as a result of the radical vectors of the 60s. In the realm of theatrical activity, the Living Theatre's efforts to reach across intercultural barriers to create art that could communicate "through the skin" in an Artaudian sense were significant and equally long lasting. Indeed, their unique efforts to profoundly alter an individ-

ual's perception of what he or she could actually do within the framework of their existing institutions impacted on the "deep waters of culture" across several continents and decades. Furthermore, the shift in their own consciousness that occurred over the span of their *Legacy of Cain* project created a transcultural spiral of artistic and political reverberations that extended well past their initial phase of radical experimentation in the 1960s.

The work of the Living Theatre discussed within my article reflects a vital global and intercultural exchange of 1960s radical politics and aesthetic forms, as the experiments they helped pioneer during the sixties were, in a sense, altered and exported internationally to Brazil. In turn, the theatrical techniques and cultural dialectic forged in South America came back to America—yet another phase of artistic, political, and cultural cross-fertilization—and further shaped the subsequent decade of the Living's life and art in Europe and beyond to the present day. Ultimately, the "radical vectors" and intercultural consciousness stimulated by their various projects revealed a willingness to seek and promote alternative models of work, life, and human relationships that influenced how several generations of radical artists have conceived the connection between life and art, mind and body, class and culture, empowerment and liberation. The Living Theatre of today continues to engage this legacy of the "radical vectors" of the late 1960s and early 1970s as they "call into question who we are in the social environment of the theater, to undo the knots that lead to social misery … to move from the theater to the street and from the street to the theater" (Living Theatre Website, February 2002).

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ABSTRACT:

The development of Subaltern Studies is considered in the context of a tripartite regional exchange among Italy (the home of Antonio Gramsci), the United Kingdom of the *Reasoner* collective, and India, considered the emblem of the post-colonial. Considered in this way, Subaltern Studies appears as a crisis discourse intended to salvage anti-colonial struggle in repeated "moments of danger."