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The Two Paths—The Laboratory Theatre and The Living Theatre

Abstract

This article juxtaposes and comments on selected aspects of the concepts and practice of two theater groups—The Laboratory Theatre and The Living Theatre. The author discusses both differences and similarities of their ideas, as well as parallel elements in their histories, resulting from socio-cultural circumstances. She highlights the recognition that both groups similarly diagnosed reality and the situation of individual in culture, and they both considered theater as a tool that could transform this situation. However, they proposed different solutions and had different goals. The author compares the attitude of the two groups to the audience

and the proposed means of its involvement in a theatrical event, linking this issue to broader concepts of communication in theater and art. The article also analyzes the attitude of Jerzy Grotowski, Julian Beck, and Judith Malina to counterculture and anarchist ideas. The analysis is based on the artists' texts and the reception of selected performances.

Keywords

Jerzy Grotowski, Julian Beck, Judith Malina, The Laboratory Theatre, The Living Theatre

Abstrakt

Dwie drogi – Teatr Laboratorium i The Living Theatre

W artykule zestawiono i skomentowano wybrane aspekty idei i praktyki dwóch grup teatralnych – Teatru Laboratorium i The Living Theatre. Autorka omawia zarówno różnice, jak i podobieństwa ich idei, oraz elementy paralelne w ich historiach, wynikające z okoliczności społeczno-kulturowych. Podkreśla, że obie grupy podobnie diagnozowały rzeczywistość i sytuację człowieka w kulturze oraz uważały teatr za narzędzie, które może tę sytuacje zmienić, proponowały jednak odmienne rozwiązania i miały różne cele. Porównuje stosunek obu grup do publiczności i proponowanych przez nie sposobów jej angażowania w teatralne wydarzenie, wiążąc to zagadnienie z szerszymi koncepcjami komunikacji w teatrze i sztuce. Analizuje także stosunek Jerzego Grotowskiego, Juliana Becka i Judith Maliny do kontrkultury i idei anarchistycznych. Podstawą analizy są teksty artystów oraz recepcja wybranych przedstawień.

Słowa kluczowe

Jerzy Grotowski, Julian Beck, Judith Malina, Teatr Laboratorium, The Living Theatre

> The Polish Laboratory Theatre Company and The Living Theatre spent a night together talking on the roof of a small hotel near Piazza di Spagna in Rome, July of 1967. We discussed our respective methods: how Grotowski's is authoritarian and separates individuals, and how ours tries to be communal. Compensation, says Grotowski, indicating the political systems in which both groups live.[1]

This meeting on the rooftop of a small hotel in Rome was probably the only direct contact between these two prominent theater groups of the twentieth century. And it's quite possible that it did actually take place. According to the invaluable Zbigniew Osiński, the Laboratory Theatre visited Italy in July 1967.[2] However, Julian Beck did not record the reminiscence of this event in his diary until three years later, on November 29, 1970, when he was in Ouro Preto, in Brazil. It is possible that he only recalled what he wanted to recall; perhaps he only remembered his own reflections.

Even if this was the case, this sentence captures well the most obvious understanding of the differences between the two groups, each of which made a lasting mark on twentieth century theater: on the one hand, an artist who methodically explored the capabilities of theater in his "laboratory," and on the other, people who believed in the potential of theater and trusted that it was mainly this belief that would allow them to make their work great; on the one hand, the discipline of actors' actions, on the other, a freedom that leads to the blurring of boundaries between the actor and their created character, and theatrical experiments carried out somewhat opaquely; on the one hand, an artist working in a state-supported "people's democracy" theater, on the other, an independent group, fleeing into exile from America's paradise on earth; on the one hand, a man who, in order to save his theater, establishes a party organization within it, and on the other, people deliberately provoking the authorities and police of many countries with their beliefs. Yet both Grotowski and the creative partnership of Beck and his wife Judith Malina, through their theater work, wanted to create a certain "personal pattern" of achieving "completeness" and self-realization.[3]

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1 Julian Beck, *The Life of the Theatre: The Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People* (New York: Limelight, 1991), 124.

2 Zbigniew Osiński, *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), 156.

3 This process has been analyzed in an extremely interesting way, with reference to both Grotowski and the Living Theatre, by Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Etos nowej sztuki* (Warszawa: PWN, 1984).

Interestingly, both Grotowski and Beck declared their lack of interest in theater from a certain point on. Grotowski, in 1972, in his manifesto "How One Could Live wrote": "I do not love theater. It is merely a field, merely a place, merely an opportunity to meet other people and to do what one loves. It does not have value in itself."[4] In 1961 Beck wrote in his journal-esque *Meditations*: "I am not a man interested in theater. . . . I do not choose to work in theater but in the world."[5] Grotowski said this about himself during a period when he stopped making plays, when he "left the theater," and took up "active culture." Beck continued to perform for more than twenty years after this declaration, until his death in 1985, but ones that were demonstrations, dramatized protests, and that broadened the understanding of the term "theatrical performance."

It is not my intention to comprehensively compare the work and significance of Grotowski and the Living Theatre here. I only want to focus on a few elements that are strangely parallel, sometimes coincidental, in the work of the two companies. Despite the fact that the peak of the activities of both companies was in the years of the so-called Second Theater Reform,[6] I think it is difficult to say that the Living Theatre or Grotowski and his company "swam with the current" or had simply joined an emerging movement. I think that both of them, at some point in their work, "encountered the world," meaning that their ideas, paths, and forms of exploration were akin to what was happening at the time in world theater. However, I believe that even if the phenomenon of counterculture theater had not occurred, the paths of both companies would have developed more or less in the same direction. The Living Theatre clearly belonged to this movement; however, it was in its vanguard, and even after its breakup, it continued to work in its own specific way, staying true to its own beliefs and ways of producing performances and the existence of the theater as an ensemble.

Both theater groups, at the time they were formed, were different from others around them. Grotowski created a theater whose primary purpose was "to study, through practical experience, the technical and creative problems of the theater, with particular emphasis on the actor's craft," where "in addition to the research conducted, the results of one's research is presented in the form of performances—the essential activity of the theater is not that of ordinary

[4] Jerzy Grotowski, "How One Could Live," *Le Théâtre en Pologne / The Theatre in Poland*, no. 4/5 (1975) [Polish edition 1972]: 33–34.

[5] Beck, *The Life of the Theatre*, 4–5.

[6] Thus, Polish theater studies, following Kazimierz Braun, describe the movement of experiments and innovative theatrical proposals that transformed stage art in the second half of the twentieth century. See Kazimierz Braun, *Druga reforma teatru: Szkice* (Wrocław: Zakład im. Ossolińskich, 1979) [editors' note].

services, but that of research and study."[7] Judith Malina and Julian Beck initially only wanted to create a "living" theater, other than Broadway-esque, one that would stage challenging dramas, touching on a variety of issues, with a repertoire—an organizational form almost unknown in American theater, due to funding factors. "Its purpose would be to stage plays that would not be performed elsewhere, to allow the voice of the poet to be heard in the theatre, and to defy all the compromises of Mammon and the critics representing the standards and values of a dissatisfied society."[8] The involvement in social and political issues, which branded their theater in a strong way, was at first only a feeling, a need rather than a plan that had to be carried out. When they went on their honeymoon to Mexico in 1948, the same year they founded the theater, they were overwhelmed by the sight of poverty. "For years, they would remember the blind beggar boy as a symbol of what it was they wanted to change about the world."[9] This trip convinced them that the world of the "untouchables" should become the subject of their theatrical work. However, they did not integrate their political involvement with their theatrical work until the 1960s.[10] It was from this period that their most famous performances came: *The Brig* (1963), *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964), *Frankenstein* (1965), and *Antigone* (1967), as well as *Paradise Now*.

Paradise Now was written in 1968, after almost twenty years of Beck and Malina's theatrical work, and thus it can arguably be considered a summation of their theatrical experience, despite them having created many more productions in the years that followed.[11] The play was supposed to be an expression of the

[7] Osiński, *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium*, 135–136.

[8] John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 139.

[9] Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, 48.

[10] Judith Malina and Julian Beck were interested in the ideas of anarchism as early as the 1940s. They owed their awareness of the fact that theater can join the debate on important political issues, among other things, to their contacts with Erwin Piscator. In the 1950s, they protested against the Korean War, which at first had considerable support from the American people. They prepared stickers, which they would then stick in public places: "Respond to war the Gandhi way," "Don't let politicians lead you to war," "War is hell, resist it." This fairly harmless activism led to their arrest by the police and accusations of "anti-American actions." In the mid-1950s, Malina was arrested for protesting against nuclear testing and sent to a psychiatric hospital for examination. (The judge believed that a person in his right mind could not protest legislation passed by his own country.) Malina and Beck served their first prison sentence in 1957 for protesting against the nuclear defense program. In the early 1960s, they protested outside the Soviet embassy against Soviet atomic testing. In 1961 they prepared the General Strike for Peace. Throughout this time they maintained contacts with the anarchist movement. The performances they staged during this time include: Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Light* (1951), Bertolt Brecht's *He Said Yes / He Said No* (1951), August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* (1954), Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (1954), Jean Racine's *Phaedra* (1955), Luigi Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise* (1955), and *Women of Trachis* based on Sophocles and Ezra Pound (1960).

[11] Marie-Claire Pasquier called it "a show that exhausts their energy, and the content they have to share." Marie-Claire Pasquier, *Le theatre americain d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978), 108.

company's positive emotions; it was to be an invitation to create "paradise now" and, more importantly, to create it here, on earth. It was intended to be their contribution to "a wonderful bloodless anarchist revolution." As an invitation and preface to this revolution, the changing of the actor–viewer relationship was to be one of its manifestations. Also, the method of preparing the performance reflected the principles of anarchism. The idea of creating a performance was conceived jointly by the ensemble. However, there were different ideas about what the performance should be about and what the nature of this supposed "paradise" was. Some members of the company believed that the performance should only touch on metaphysical problems, others that its meaning should be political. The end result was a combination of these two intents. Instead of presenting idyllic images of what life would be like in an already reached paradise, the Living Theatre focused on conveying the idea that reaching it was only possible through revolutionary action.

Paradise Now required the audience to actually participate in the performance, every third part of each scene—a level from which the performance was built, called for "Action," which was an invitation to become an actor, to take the stage. For it to happen, the audience's participation was crucial. Here, the audience was not a "privileged class" to whom the performance is "presented"; their participation was requisite for the actors in order to realize the performance. As a result, the performance lasted for many hours, and during this lengthy time groups of audience members would form, debating, joking, and even eating together. Julian Beck, in an interview with Richard Schechner after the American performances of the play, explains this approach:

> We said in preparing *Paradise Now* that we wanted to make a play which would no longer be enactment but would be the act itself, that we would not reproduce something but we would try to create an event in which we would always ourselves be experiencing it, not anew at all but something else each time; not reproducing and bringing to life the same thing again and again and again but always it would be a new experience for us and it would be different from what we called acting.[12]

One can argue with the view of whether, in fact, after making this show, the Living Theatre had nothing left to say. But it should be emphasized that it can truly be considered the most complete attempt at revolutionary theatrical expression, both in terms of the proposed content and in the form that it took on.

[12] Judith Malina and Julian Beck, "Containment Is the Enemy," interview by Richard Schechner, *The Drama Review* 13, no. 3 (1969): 24, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1144455. It is worth comparing Beck's thought with a summary of paratheatrical activities made from a certain time perspective by Grotowski himself, who listed the common characteristics of all stagings: "These include the unity of time, place and action, in the sense that what happens happens when it really happens and it is what really happens between people. Paratheater is not an imitation, image, or reference to any other reality than the one experienced literally. In paratheatrical activities, there is

Schechner, in turn, added that the performance reminded him of the rituals relating to Yom Kippur. According to him, the structure of *Paradise Now*, like Yom Kippur, is such that regardless of what one does—eats, talks, or even goes out for a while—one is still participating in the performance. Here, the audience reminded him of the congregation, while the actors reminded him of the rabbis and cantors, who are concerned with continuing the ritual. In this way, Schechner introduced us to the issue of "rituality" in the Living Theatre's performances. Moreover, this rituality was planned and, in a way, "prompted" by Beck and Malina themselves. The initial part of each "level" was just called a "ritual."

Beck and Malina owed their belief in the ritualistic nature of theater to the beliefs of Antonin Artaud, whose writings they became familiar with, admittedly, after seven years of theatrical activity, in 1958,[13] but which nonetheless had a strong influence on the shape of their productions.

> As it turned out, The Living Theatre was to stay content to follow its natural inclinations and to make do without Artaud, although the discovery of Artaud's work was an invaluable stimulus, confirmation and encouragement to them. The avant-gardism of the early years had been relatively rational. Artaud had held out the invitation to journey: there were territories still undiscovered, there were visions beyond controlled perception.[14]

Another commentator, John Tytell, writing later than Biner, recalls the words of Barrault, who, after seeing *The Brig*, called the show "Artaud's legacy." The same Tytell gives, as another example of such a legacy, Grotowski's Laboratory, "whose state-subsidized actors seemed as inspired as the members of The Living Theatre."[15]

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no division between actors and spectators, all those present are—to a certain extent—active participants," Jerzy Grotowski, "Hipoteza robocza," *Polityka*, no. 4 (1980): 1, 4.) Thus, it seems that Beck and Grotowski were nearest to each other in their understanding of the possibilities and tasks of "theater" at a time when the latter had already left the theater.

[13] They registered the theater in 1948 but did not give their first show until 1951.

[14] Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre*, trans. Robert Meister (New York: Avon Books, 1972), 53.

[15] Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, 215. Tytell himself writes this about Artaud's influence on Beck's theater: "*The Theatre and Its Double* had an irresistible appeal for Julian because of Artaud's premise that the plague (rather than bacchanal or divine rout as Nietzsche speculates in *The Birth of Tragedy*) was a primal source of the sense of spectacle." "The delirium of the plague state was powerful enough to activate the latent anarchy in all people, to move them to demonstrate with extreme gestures. Theatre, as well, could induce extreme gestures, particularly by imposing a mode of suffering or cruelty on the audience." Tytell, 149. Grotowski, on the other hand, expressed his skepticism about the possibility of realizing Artaud's ideas on stage. It is possible that some of the descriptions of the „compromised legacy" included in the text devoted to Artaud "He Wasn't Entirely Himself," could be an indictment of the Living Theatre's productions, such as the final scene of *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* inspired by the French prophet's description of the plague, during which the actors are writhing and screaming

Did those involved themselves acknowledge this affinity? Biner, in an interview included in his book, asked Beck and Malina if watching *The Constant Prince* during the 1966 Theater of Nations was any help to them.[16] I think their response is worth quoting in full.

> Judith: To see someone communicate with the body in such directly personal way was obviously useful for us. We were surprised that although we move along parallel lines, the resemblance between us is quite minimal. We were astonished to find that although we were moving along parallel lines, the resemblance between us was very faint. We were equally surprised by his strict discipline, his method. Moreover, we sometimes obtained comparable results through an extreme personal lack of disciplinary methods. I think this is simply because we live in the same epoch.
> Julian: I saw only a small part of the performance, but I was struck by it immediately. I recognized immediately that it was in direct relationship with what we were sketching for our *Antigone* rehearsals. Beside, the manner of Grotowski's adaptation of Calderon was quite close to ours in respect to Mary Shelly. I was greatly encouraged, because I saw proof that what we wanted to do could work, it was working![17]

So what were these differences and similarities based on? In his monograph, Biner emphasizes the similarity between the two groups, consisting in their practice of the "theater of poverty." This similarity would be based on a shared abandonment of the use of props, with the use of simple lighting and "the only offerings, symbolic fashion, are body and spirit."[18] At the same time, he points to differences in the method of working: the Laboratory's "essential privacy" in both the preparation and presentation of the performance is contrasted with the Living Theatre's approach, which is directed toward obtaining audience participation.

Reading Beck and Malina's and Grotowski's texts, one can find a very similar recognition of reality and the situation of an individual in culture. Both saw the duality and split nature of the human being. They believed that theater was the very thing that could change this situation. Grotowski answered his

as they act out their deaths. See Jerzy Grotowski, "He Wasn't Entirely Himself," in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, 2002), 117–125. More on Grotowski's approach towards Artaud can be found in Leszek Kolankiewicz, *Święty Artaud* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1988), chapter 5 and following.

[16] It was after the presentations of *The Constant Prince* in Paris that Grotowski was called „the illegitimate son of Artaud," see Kolankiewicz, *Święty Artaud*, 146, 236.

[17] Biner, *The Living Theatre*, 161.

[18] Biner, 100.

own question "why am I concerned with art?" in his manifesto *Towards a Poor Theatre*, answering:

> To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness—fulfill ourselves. This is not a condition but a process in which what is dark in us slowly becomes transparent. In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life-mask, the theatre, with its full-fleshed perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation. It is capable of challenging itself and its audience by violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling, and judgment—more jarring because it is imaged in the human organism's breath, body, and inner impulses. This defiance of taboo, this transgression, provides the shock which rips off the mask. . . . The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it.[19]

Judith Malina also wanted a myth on the stage, "where Mysteries are recalled from the oblivion of pre-classical times,"[20] a myth that enlivens the audience. Beck added that they wanted

> to aid the audience to become once more what it was destined to be when the first dramas formed themselves on the threshing floor: a congregation led by priests, a choral ecstasy of reading and response, dance, seeking transcendence, a way out and up, the vertical thrust, seeking a state of awareness that surpasses mere conscious being and brings you closer to God.[21]

Their belief in the ever-achievable rituality of theater was perhaps due to the fact that they were people of faith and practicing Jews, celebrating holidays, even during their travels in Europe. But they also layered new symbolism on top of these holidays, for example, Passover which they would organize for the troupe, not only as a celebration of the Jews' exodus from Egypt, but also as a celebration of human liberation from slavery.

In the performances, however, the actions led in the opposite direction; they created a "ritual" in an effort to instill shared beliefs. Their "rituals" would involve beliefs that were deeply rooted in the consciousness of individual members of

[19] Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 21–22.

[20] Judith Malina, unpublished diary, March 16, 1958, quoted in Tytell, *The Living Theatre*, 199.

[21] Julian Beck, "Storming the Barricades," in Kenneth Brown, *The Brig* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), 21, quoted in Tytell, 199.

the group, or rather, the group as a collection of individuals. Yet most of the audience did not share their beliefs, including the belief in the most important issue, that of "revolutionary nonviolence." By presenting these "ritual"-actions, they believed they were able to instill, or "infect," the audience with their own beliefs.[22] Thus, a reverse of rituals, for the existence of which a common faith shared by the collective is necessary.

Grotowski was well aware of this issue. In the early period of his theatrical activity, while speaking out against "an overly cultural theater," he also referred to "primal theatrical spontaneity."

> I believed that since it was the primal rituals that brought theater into existence, therefore, through a return to ritual . . . one can find this ceremonial of direct, live participation, a kind of reciprocity . . . an open, direct, liberated and authentic reaction. I had, of course, some initial ideas, for example, that actors and the audience should be confronted, as it were, head-to-head in space, and that this mutual exchange of reactions should be pursued either in the realm of language *tout court*, or in the realm of the language of theater, that is, to offer the audience a kind of interplay.[23]

Thus, it is clear that the practices advocated by the Living Theatre with regard to audiences were also unfamiliar to the early period of Grotowski's work, who wrote:

> We do not demonstrate the action to the viewer, but invite him or her into "co-shamanism," in which the viewer's lively interim presence is part of the stage play.[24] We arrange a collective that is not clearly divided into spectators and actors, but rather into primary and secondary participants. . . . The actors also address the audience directly, treating them as co-authors and even prompting them to participate in stage movement.[25]

However, while the Living team remained committed to this kind of practice, because it was clearly important for them to continue to get the viewer active

[22] I use the word ritual here in quotation marks because I am not convinced that the word is entirely appropriate as a term for such a form of activity.

[23] Jerzy Grotowski, "Teatr a rytuał," *Dialog*, no. 8 (1969): 65.

[24] Quoted in Osiński, *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium*, 80.

[25] Osiński, 91.

both within and outside of the performance, Grotowski, over time, evaluated these practices quite skeptically:

> We tried to achieve direct audience participation a number of years ago. We pushed for this at all costs, as is the case elsewhere today. We forced the audience to "play" with us, to come out to the middle of the stage, to sing with us, to make the gestures or movements that we suggest to them. We came to a point where we rejected this kind of procedure, because it was clear that we were exerting pressure, exercising a kind of tyranny towards the audience. After all, we were putting the people who came to us in a false, disloyal situation—we were prepared for this kind of encounter, they were not. We did it because we were willing, they did it because we forced it upon them.[26]

Despite similarities in the desire to interact with the audience, the Living's tactics were somewhat different. In his experiments, Grotowski sought a place for the viewer, in a sense, within the planned and prepared "score" of the performance. As he himself puts it:

> But this was well prepared in advance, and, in fact, far from what is nowadays called a happening—for example, during rehearsals, the actors tried to identify different versions of behavior, taking into account the different possibilities of the audience's behavior. . . . For all performances [in reference to Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*—JO] we prepared, in advance, several versions of the actors' reactions towards the audience, in accordance with the response of the latter.[27]

The audience's response was therefore also to be subject to the overarching idea of the show.

The Living Theatre used this tactic somewhat differently. In its performances, it merely provoked, or encouraged, the audience to create or exchange ideas freely. It was the reactions of the people that determined, say, how long *Paradise Now* would last. The audience was not included in the action of the performance; it was they who created it at certain points. Keeping the show as planned by its creators was not of utmost importance.

[26] "Spotkanie z Grotowskim," ed. Ludwik Flaszen, *Teatr*, no. 5 (1972): 19.

[27] Grotowski, "Teatr a rytuał," 65.

> We do assume participation because the audience has to think through our ideas. In *Utopia*, for example, we ask what are their desires and then we play them out for them, and with them. To make sure that the audience is involved, we look for theatrical techniques that will also make the audience take responsibility for the performance, so that they take responsibility for the performance as well, that they are collectively creative together with us and there is no division between them and us. That's part of the anarchist message, without actually saying anything about anarchism—it's about giving people the sense that they themselves can create a performance, because what they say is important.[28]

In the performance *The Zero Method*, which I viewed, a discussion was integrated, not only between actors and audience members, but also between individual spectators as well. The starting point of the conversation, being part of this performance, which is extremely personal and which in a way sums up the theatrical history of Malina and Hanon Reznikov (her current husband and co-runner of the theater), was the question of whether the audience came here "for the Living Theatre or for Wittgenstein," on whose *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* the performance was based. Then the discussion turned to the prospects for independent theater and forms of financing it, and at one point jumped to environmental issues. When the conversation died down, the actors returned to their actions. "The theater becomes a forum, a political meeting, a crossroads of impassioned exchanges, a *cour des miracles*."[29]

In his further explorations, Grotowski considered other variants of the actor–viewer relation, one that could provoke the authentic participation of the viewer, which would not necessarily mean that it would have to be an active participation.

> For instance, when we want to give the spectator a chance to participate in an emotive, direct, but emotive way . . . then it is necessary to distance the viewers from the actors, contrary to what one might seem to think. . . . Thus, the following conclusion: if one wishes to immerse the spectator in the performance, in the cruel—so to speak—script of the performance . . . , I am referring to the cruelty that is simply not lying . . . in such a performance, and even to impose on them a sense of distance towards the actors, they should be mingled with the actors.[30]

[28] Judith Malina, "Przysięgam, że nigdy cię nie zabiję," interview by Joanna Ostrowska and Ewa Obrębowska-Piasecka, *Czas Kultury*, no. 3 (1996): 74.

[29] Biner, *The Living Theatre*, 175.

[30] Grotowski, "Teatr a rytuał," 66.

A similar tactic was used by the Living Theatre in *Paradise Now*. At the beginning of the performance, the actors, passing between the audience, uttered sentences: "I'm not allowed to travel without a passport," "I don't know how to stop wars," "You can't live if you don't have money," "I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana," "I'm not allowed to take off my clothes."[31] People accused them of not perceiving what was happening in the audience, where the smell of marijuana could be sensed; Schechner took off his clothes in protest of this "not perceiving." The actors were pleased with his reaction, for an audience member had broken through the barrier of non-perception. Malina described her tactics for shaping this scene as follows: "We are possessed by what we say. I can't hear you because I've gone mad from all the prohibitions around me." Beck added: "All these prohibitions also make communication impossible. It is yet another barrier that you feel and maybe you will scream."[32] Thus, as in Grotowski's case, this bringing of actors closer to the audience, mingling them, was supposed to further intensify the effect of remoteness or even rejection. The Living Theatre, however, was slowly moving away from confrontational tactics in favor of direct communication.

These different approaches, different ways of communication, were also due to the slightly different goals of the two groups. The Living Theatre wanted to bring about an anarchist revolution with its theatrical work, which would bring about a "paradise now" here on earth. Grotowski did not believe in, and perhaps did not see the need for, such radical change. The program he set was a bit more modest, and involved creating only—or perhaps as much as—islands where mankind would be able to free itself from the need to act, fight, pretend, and take off its mask: islands that would provide a counterbalance to the dominant culture. He was not, however, creating a vision with the goal of exclusivity, of prevailing, of becoming the only one, all-embracing. It was merely a certain proposal to be accepted or rejected—one of Grotowski's texts is titled "How One Could Live." This program, which was outlined in the article "Holiday," is an attempt to create a second course of life, because, as Grotowski wrote, "in order to get closer to the 'impossible,' one must somehow be realistic."

> Maybe one must begin with some particular places . . . where we do not hide ourselves and simply are as we are, in all the possible senses of the word. Does it mean that we remain in a vicious circle—that life is different here, and different there?

[31] Quoted in Judith Malina and Julian Beck, *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of The Living Theatre* (New York: Random House, 1971), 15–17.

[32] Malina and Beck, "Containment Is the Enemy," 29–30.

> No, I think that this will come out outside the place I have been talking about, will come out through a small opening, gap, window, door, penetrate outside.[33]

In a book titled *Ziarno*, Andrzej Bonarski collected interviews he conducted with theater artists. The book opens with an interview with Grotowski, and closes with a conversation with Malina and Beck. The latter, whose *Money Tower* he had seen earlier, were asked, "Why don't you work directly in politics?" To which they replied:

> We work by advocating on behalf of revolutionary organizations and anarchist unions, taking part in demonstrations and in political life. Political action is the purpose of our existence. Any theatrical work that does not serve the cause of liberating the people from their agony is counter-revolutionary. . . . Theater that does not take political reality into account deceives and fools the audience. Thus, apolitical theater supports the bourgeois mentality.[34]

Several pages earlier in the book, Grotowski defends himself against the accusation of "immorality" leveled against him by some, of creating a theater for the elite, when "the overwhelming majority of humanity lives struggling for survival."

> What seems immoral to me is to acquiesce to someone else's hard struggle for existence in order to prey on it through creative themes, by sharing with others the concern and with oneself the privileged position that comes from the status of a man of the arts. Either we assume that it is pointless to make any effort that does not directly aim to reduce the amount of misery and the amount of misfortune . . . , or we assume that the development of the species is very complex and thus that the urges that are unleashed are unleashed in a phased manner, so that what still seems exclusive remains connected and somehow changes what we consider to be universal. If one is not dedicated to *ad hoc* political action, then no matter what kind of humanity one practices, one assumes that there are other urges besides material ones.[35]

Malina and Beck intended to spark their revolution in the name of precisely these non-material urges. Speaking about political issues, they could not take

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33 Jerzy Grotowski, "Holiday," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner (London: Routledge, 1997), 221.

34 Andrzej Bonarski, *Ziarno* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1979), 127.

35 Bonarski, *Ziarno*, 33.

advantage of the "privileged position of an artist." They attested to their commitment with their daily life-theater. I think that to some extent they recognized in Grotowski a "comrade" of their struggle. When he was forbidden to come to the United States, Malina wrote in her diary:

> Julian suggests that the actors and intellectuals take some more vigorous form of protest action than a note of protest to the State Department—say a strike action—to voice their objection to the ban on the Peking Opera, the Berliner Ensemble, and the Grotowski Theatre Laboratory. . . . The ban on Grotowski is part of the American government's unwholesome way of waging "cultural warfare." To express disapproval for the intervention in Czechoslovakia, the State Department "punishes" the European socialist countries by withdrawing support for cultural events—the fact that Grotowski's work may go beyond his country's political position is outside their interest. The Peking Opera and the Berliner Ensemble, on the other hand, are unwelcome in the United States because they specifically *do* support the politics of their respective countries.[36]

To conclude, instead of a summary, yet another trace of an intertwined story—a note from Judith Malina's diary: "January 12, 1969: Before the *Paradise* performance. . . . Under the stage we watch a TV presentation of Grotowski's *Akropolis*."[37]

Translated by Maciej Mahler

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36 Judith Malina, *The Enormous Despair* (New York: Random House, 1972), 65–66.

37 Malina, *The Enormous Despair*, 164.

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