

Artaud, Living Theatre, Performance Group: Unsuccessful Catalysts for Lasting Cultural Change

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Abstract

Theatre actors have been progressively taking ideas from other artists and building on them since the concept of theatrical performance began. It is important then, for each group to look at the artists who have come before and either emulate them, clarify their work, or create new work themselves. Henrik Ibsen, a 19th century Norwegian playwright and director, later reached great acclaim for his ground-breaking work, *A Doll's House*. For this and some of his other works (e.g. *Hedda Gabler* and *Ghosts*), Ibsen is commonly known as the Father of Realism. His plays brought true life onstage, and he sought to teach the audience a moral lesson. Ibsen's work propelled realism into the forefront, which, after a time, became outdated and new styles of theatre emerged.

Introduction

As theatre artists tired of the realism brought into play by Ibsen and his contemporaries, later theatre artists, such as Ellen Stewart of La MaMa and Joseph Chaikin of the Open Theatre, began to forge new paths into what they believed theatre could be if the art form steered away from convention. In the United States, new anti-theatrical establishment mentality stemmed from the works of Antonin Artaud, a 20th century French theorist who seemed to fail at all he attempted. Artaud suffered from severe nervous breakdowns, had an addictive relationship with opium, and was often institutionalized. Through this never-ending suffering, he began to develop the Theatre of Cruelty, his vision for what the future of theatre should be. He criticized the theatre of his day: realistic plays, which focused mainly on domestic issues, and revivals of classics that served as entertainment to temporarily distract the mentally war-torn soldiers who returned from World War I. In his seminal collection of essays, *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud complained that:

An idea of the theater has been lost. And as long as the theater limits itself to showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets, transforming the public into Peeping Toms, it is no wonder the elite abandon it and the great public looks to the movies, the music hall or the circus for violent satisfactions, whose intentions do not deceive them.

(84)

Like Artaud and his dreams of theatrical grandeur, the pioneers of American avant-garde theatre in the 1960s and 1970s strove to significantly shift the culture, but their attempts were largely unsuccessful. As will be discussed, wildly experimental theatre rarely created the political and social change that was desired. One example is the Living Theatre, an early American experimental company that sought to inspire anarchy by using the theories of Antonin Artaud as a model. Judith Malina and Julian Beck (founders, directors, and actors of the Living

Theatre) succeeded in establishing avant-garde theatre in America and desired to practically apply Artaud's theories to their own work. In Malina's essay "Directing *The Brig*," (her notes on directing a piece influenced by Artaud's concept of repeated and symbolic gestures), she described the Theatre of Cruelty as follows:

He [Artaud] it is who demanded of the actor the great athletic feats: the meaningless gestures broken off into gestures of pain and insanity; who cried out in his crazy-house cell for a theatre so violent that no man who experienced it would ever stomach violence again. (158)

Beck and Malina nevertheless failed to generate lasting cultural change through their politically charged performances. First the effect of Artaud's theories on his own society and his influence on later experimental companies will be examined. Secondly, the impact of the Living Theatre's influence (or lack thereof) on the cultural/political climate and the future of avant-garde performance will be explored in context of the student protests of the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, Richard Schechner and his Performance Group's production of *Dionysus in '69*, as a culmination of the Living Theatre's performance aesthetics and Artaud's theories, will be discussed.

Artaud found that theatre was too passive. It allowed the members of the public to delve comfortably into another person's life instead of thinking about their own. Instead, Artaud called for a theatre that rapidly purified society like an epidemic. He writes in his essay, "The Theatre and the Plague:"

If the essential theater is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of

latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized. (Artaud 30)

Later, he comments that:

The theater, like the plague, is in the image of this carnage and this essential separation. It releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor of the theater, but of life.

(Artaud 31)

The plague would burn out all aspects of pretentiousness in both the theatre and the people who witness it. In other words, if the audience was sufficiently horrified by Artaud's theatre, it would cause them to actively prevent the brutal violence he witnessed during the Great War.

Artaud felt that theatre had the potential to change the savage nature of the world around him. France had been damaged in World War I, the war the world believed would end all wars. The loss of life devastated France, with more than a million men killed in battle and over 300,000 civilians killed by the flu pandemic (Mougel 5). Inflation became "untamable" to offset the weakened economy (Baubeau). Surrounded by unspeakable violence, Artaud wished for his theatre to hold a mirror up to the war-ravaged country. Artaud was plagued with the monumental challenge of how to translate his theories into theatrical practice. To fully embody the extremities of internal emotion, Artaud stated that "language, if used, should no longer be humanistic, realistic, and psychological but religious and mystic, the language of incantation" (Carlson 394). Theatre should not focus on text, nor should it rely solely on dialogue. Dialogue does not fully encapsulate the full range of human emotion, so Artaud believed a new language for the theatre had to be established. This new language should be made up of intonations,

yells, barks, and cries. Instead of the standard proscenium theatre used for realistic plays and operas, Artaud wrote that he wanted his productions staged in “some hangar or barn, which we shall have re-constructed according to processes which have culminated in the architecture of certain churches or holy places, and of certain temples in Tibet” (Artaud 96). In these found spaces, the audience should be seated in swivel chairs so that the action can “attack the spectator’s sensibility on all sides” (Artaud 86). Although perhaps groundbreaking in hindsight, Artaud’s theories seemed so far-fetched that they were pushed to the side and his own attempts to realize his theories in practice failed in the view of his contemporary audience.

Artaud’s impact on society when he lived was minimal. Due to financial reasons, Artaud was unable to stage a production that would fully present his theories, so he created a performance out of his essay, “The Theatre and the Plague,” instead. Artaud stood on stage and read his writings out loud to the crowd. Anaïs Nin, a writer with whom Artaud had a romantic involvement, wrote of his staged reading:

At first people gasped. And then they began to laugh. Everyone was laughing! They hissed. Then one by one, they began to leave, noisily, talking, protesting. They banged the door as they left... More protestations. More jeering. But Artaud went on, until the last gasp. And stayed on the floor. (qtd. in Barber 63)

In 1935, Artaud premiered his sole staging, a performance of his adaptation of Percy Shelley’s *The Cenci*, a play about a 16th century Italian count who was brutally murdered by his family and their servants after he violently raped his daughter, Beatrice. This was the show he believed would finally bring his Theatre of Cruelty to the stage, but because of financial restraints, he was not able to completely fulfill his vision. Opening night was relatively successful, but the

novelty soon wore off. After the first performance, “the newspaper reviews were almost all hostile, and they derided what they saw as a strange mixture of cacophony and strained gestures” (Barber 72).

Artaud’s grand visions were dashed as French audiences dismissed his performances as nothing more than unintelligible jokes. The audience felt attacked by their savage nature. Artaud’s performances were too hostile: the traumatized post-World War I audience, being subjected to similar horrors on the stage, shut down and mocked Artaud instead of being able to internalize his message and move to action. There was no way for Artaud to change the violent culture if those who participated in it refused or were unable to see the error of their ways through his performances. It is debatable whether or not it is realistically possible to use theatre to incite change or if Artaud just failed at his theatrical endeavors in the way that he failed at most everything else. Artaud passed away in 1948, having never truly seen his theories realized on stage despite his deep beliefs in his own work, but decades after his death, his theoretical work received attention from the pioneers of experimental American theatre.

Artaud’s *The Theatre and its Double* was translated into English in 1958. Two years later, his politically and socially charged theatre would be needed in the United States. The college students of the 1950s, otherwise known as the “silent generation,” refused to stand up against injustice and wrongdoings on college campuses because of a belief that their superiors held infallible authority (Kaplan qtd. in Sorey and Gregory 187). One belief is that the “silent generation,” having seen the effects of McCarthyism and the Red Scare, thought it was dangerous to speak out against anything they perceived as unjust because of potential governmental backlash. This generation was also given the name of “the lucky few” due to the

fact that they had a relatively easier way through life, as:

They were born during the upheaval of the Great Depression and World War II but enjoyed a smooth and easy transition to adulthood in the relatively prosperous 1950s and early 1960s. Men served in the military as much as those in the Greatest Generation but their time in uniform was not marked by war and high casualties to the extent of the previous generation. (Population Reference Bureau)

However, as the civil rights movement progressed through the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the draft for the Vietnam War was put into place in the early 1960s, America saw an increase in non-violent protests in the form of sit-ins and marches.

According to a study on campus protests conducted by Old Dominion University professors Kellie C. Sorey and Dennis E. Gregory, “by the middle of the decade, tactical shifts began to occur. Non-violent demonstrations were replaced by disruptive and often violent revolts during the latter part of the decade” (188). These new violent outbursts were frequently caused by police officers who abused their power in order to brutalize college students who protested against the university system, racial prejudice, and the developing war (Sorey and Gregory 188). “During the 1960s students and society underwent phenomenal transition. Both students and society as a whole began to expect more of their colleges, of their governments and of their society” (Sorey and Gregory 187). The “silent generation” of the fifties was being rapidly replaced by a new wave of young people who refused to tolerate injustice in any form (the draft, student disenfranchisement, and increasing concerns over the environment). These new protests reached a wide audience when the Nixon/Kennedy presidential debate in 1960 established television as a vehicle for politics. TV, along with the radio and newspapers, allowed

the student protests to become national events, evoking either strong opposition or substantial support from the rest of America. The police brutality against protesting students reached a fever pitch in 1970 during the Kent State University protests against the bombing in Cambodia, approved by President Nixon. On May 4th, four Kent State students were shot and killed by the Ohio National Guard.

On September 26, 1970, William Scranton and the President's Commission on Campus Unrest released a report, which outlined the causes of campus protest and suggested solutions. According to the report, the opposition to the student protests by the older generation was "often intensified by a more general revulsion against the distinctive dress, lifestyle, behavior, or speech adopted by some of the young people" (United States, President's Commission on Campus Unrest 40). Some people saw the protests as a young person's excuse to be violent and cause destruction to the established American lifestyle. The report condemns the violence caused by the protests:

Violence must stop because it is wrong. It destroys human life and the products of human effort. It undermines the foundations of a just social order. No progress is possible in a society where lawlessness prevails. Violence must stop because the sounds of violence drown out all words of reason. (United States, President's Commission on Campus Unrest 3)

The condemnation of violence put forth by the commission echoes Artaud's cry for an awakened audience to stop senseless violence.

The paradox of Artaud's plea for non-violence through a violent theatre was heard and understood by the Living Theatre, an experimental theatre group founded by Julian Beck and

Judith Malina on Wooster Street a year before Artaud passed away. The Living Theatre was heavily impacted by Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* after it was finally translated into English. Renfrew Neff, author of *The Living Theatre: USA*, writes that, "to understand the work of the Living Theatre it is necessary to understand Artaud, to know that his concepts form the spine of that work" (78). Beck and Malina believed that liberation of society could be accomplished by the freeing of theatre from its conventional shackles: "Free the theatre... Free the street... Begin" (qtd. in Neff 217). Just as Artaud had desired a form of communication that transcended dialogue, the Living Theatre knew that:

A non-verbal dramatic idiom had to be found that would go beyond words and reach the public on a level that transcended the need for language. Through the writings of Artaud and various spiritual and metaphysical doctrines, and through the use of drugs that expanded consciousness, a 'magic' was created that eliminated the need for and the barriers established by verbal communication. (Neff 12)

The Living Theatre had been doing work long before their first encounter with Artaud. They began as an "imaginative alternative to the commercial theatre" (Walker) and the Living Theatre staged alternative plays in an apartment paid for by Beck's father. In 1951, Beck rented the Cherry Lane Theatre and produced seasons of avant-garde plays, including *Ubu the King* by Alfred Jarry and *Desire Trapped by the Tail* by Picasso. Beck and Malina were dedicated non-violent anarchists. They were often arrested for partaking in protests. In 1963, after the Living Theatre read the English translation of Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double*, their production of Kenneth Brown's *The Brig* was their first attempt at a performance with Artaudian influences, and it got the attention of the authorities. Their theatre was shut down by

the IRS due to their refusal to pay taxes, and the Living Theatre migrated to Europe to become a traveling company. While in Europe, the Living Theatre opened three of their most famous pieces: *Antigone*, *Frankenstein*, and *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*. In 1968, the company of the Living Theatre created *Paradise Now*. These four pieces were directly impacted by Artaud. *Frankenstein* was the “closest embodiment of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty that has been attempted in theatre” (Neff 66). *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* finished with a physical representation of the plague that Artaud describes in “The Theatre and the Plague.” *Paradise Now* took Artaud’s desire to return theatre to its ritual roots and used them to visualize a ladder to a perfect society.

The Living Theatre’s work was fundamentally anti-establishment. From the beginning, the Living Theatre sought to highlight voices of playwrights who were unknown and underdeveloped in American theatre. Their work amplified the need for camaraderie, and many of their shows (such as *Frankenstein* and *Antigone*) fought back against the societal shaming of the ‘other.’ When the Living Theatre was exposed to Artaud, they found a deep connection with his story and his mission. He, too, was an artist striving for an alternative path to the mainstream. Like the Living Theatre, Artaud was ostracized and attacked for what he believed was essential and good work. *Paradise Now* became a culmination of the Living Theatre’s work so far. They wanted to fight back against the American machine of war and propaganda. *Paradise Now* was the Living Theatre’s rallying cry for a better world that allowed marijuana use, allowed traveling with no borders, and the abolition of money.

Paradise Now:

Is primarily a series of provocations to revolution and anarchy (denunciations of the

necessity of wearing clothing, of having a passport, of having money, and demands that one be indifferent to economics and to moral strictures). It requires four or five hours to perform. In the program, the action is broken into twenty-four scenes arranged into eight triads (a rite, a vision, a contemporary example) which form an order of ascent, each moving closer to the present situation. At the end, it is envisioned that the audience will move into the streets to continue the work begun in the theatre. (Brockett and Findlay 743)

Compared to realistic, Western theatre (in which a piece will contain set characters, plots, and designs), *Paradise Now* was a great deviation from the norm. The piece was devised and changed depending on the feedback from the audience during the performance. The actors played themselves and the performance could be done just about anywhere.

Paradise Now was meant to be a performance that incited the audience to strip off their clothes at the end and march onto the streets in order to demand liberation for themselves and for their society. In the words of Jenny Hecht, one of the Living Theatre's actors:

To do a play about Paradise Now in a world that is doing a play called Hell [our lives] is a revolutionary act. To find an anarchy (of a sort) in our community, an example for loving the world, that may be the next exemplary step in getting the world to change. (qtd. in *The Living Theatre*, "Paradise Now" 96)

For Julian Beck, *Paradise Now* would be the Living Theatre's seminal work: "*Paradise Now* has to be, is my, our, message to the world. It has to be" (qtd. in Malina and Beck, "Containment" 94). Gerald Rabkin, author of "The Return of the Living Theatre: Paradise Lost" described the performance as "representing the quintessential aesthetic of the Living Theatre" (13). Despite

this, he continued to describe his “discomfort at the bullying hostility and self-righteousness” of the performance. Rabkin’s comments condemned *Paradise Now* as “radically significant,” but unbelievable (13). Although the Living Theatre designed *Paradise Now* to be a vision for how the world could be, the performance came across as selfish and unrealistic. Despite perhaps entertaining its audience, *Paradise Now* was a haphazard attempt at protest. The Living Theatre had hoped that, through the performance, audiences would be so outraged by the injustices put forth by the group that they would run out into the streets and immediately enact change. Just as Artaud discovered with his production of *The Cenci*, audiences are much more likely to shut down and dismiss the work instead of internalizing it and acting.

The Living Theatre returned to the United States in 1968 with a tour of *Paradise Now*. From October 31 to November 8, the company played Cambridge, Massachusetts. When they arrived at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Living Theatre found that “Michael O’Connor, an AWOL soldier, was staying at the student center at MIT, where he had requested, and had been granted, sanctuary in his protest against the Vietnam war” (Neff 99). The FBI were the only ones allowed to detain O’Connor and his imminent arrest was protested. During this protest, the help of the Living Theatre was fervently requested by the students:

Would the Living please come over and do something? They [The Living Theatre] had accepted and had appeared with the plan to bring everyone together with a ‘Chord’. But the students wanted more direct action, a demonstration - do something! On the grounds that the methods suggested would only lead to a violent confrontation with local authorities, the Living had declined. Then what should we do? The students asked. ‘Get the fuck out of MIT,’ advised a spokesman for the company, and the Living left. (Neff

100)

Despite desperate pleas from the rioting students who believed the Living Theatre could conduct real change, the Living Theatre fled from Cambridge in fear of getting into trouble. The Sanctuary at MIT, composed of protesting students and faculty, described the Living Theatre as “just a bunch of bullshit actors and hippies” (Neff 101). The situation only worsened when the Living Theatre crossed the country to California. The Living Theatre began to lose credibility as a force for change, and their performances, once hailed for their political commentary, were seen as thinly veiled facades.

From February 18th through the 20th, the University of California, Berkeley campus was amidst riots caused by “an acceleration of police-inflicted violence” (Neff 162). College protests were rampant, and some students adopted a nihilistic belief due to the overwhelming explosion of violence; for them:

The Kennedys had been heroes, and therefore worthy of monuments, while martyrs were useful as symbols; Gandhi was killed, and King had been shot. There was no end in sight for the cycle of violence...and some said it no longer mattered, since due to mismanagement of the planet, time was running out anyway. (Neff 163)

If protests could not stop the violence, how would it be possible that theatre could? Like Artaud, the Living Theatre was stuck in between active protests and performative ones. The violence they portrayed was easier to perform in a theatre than in the streets.

The Living Theatre, for all of its earlier influential pieces, began to lose touch with the quickly evolving counterculture of the United States. Despite being a theatre company that created performances to vehemently oppose modesty culture, the Living Theatre had its own fair

share of shortcomings when it came to real-life political protest. A riot broke out before a performance of *Paradise Now* at UC Berkeley. Students had expected members of the Living Theatre to join the fight, but they were nowhere to be found.

It seemed a simple matter of public relations that could win a few friends and influence some serious people for a change. But it was a fantasy that never materialized. Too spaced, too lazy, too fucked up on drugs, they never showed up to try to prevent the three o'clock riot. (Neff 165)

The conscious-expanding drugs used to create the “non-verbal dramatic idiom” (Neff 12) apparently prevented the Living Theatre from legitimizing themselves as a political protest theatre company. Because of this negligence to join the students, *Paradise Now* was seen as a caricature of the protest movement. The pleasures that *Paradise Now* fought for seemed petty and irrelevant compared to the violent protests:

Unable, unwilling, to grasp this approximation of a functioning paradise, the world they presumed to envision was reduced to embarrassing harangues and meaningless slogans. ‘I’m not allowed to smoke marijuana’...a joke when it is sold and smoked on the streets; “‘I’m not allowed to travel without a passport’...this is not the young audience’s idea of a trip; ‘You can’t live if you don’t have money.’ (Neff 167-168)

Many of the Berkeley students in the audience demanded their money back after seeing that the Living Theatre’s performance was as fake as the company’s activism (McEvoy 12).

By the end of the Living Theatre’s American tour in 1969, “several members of the company felt the tour had not realized their political goals with all the scandal” (Walker). The company dispersed into four factions, each with their own goal in mind, leaving the Living

Theatre with only about ten actors after 1970. Judith Malina and Julian Beck went on to bring their theatre to the streets, wanting to bring the concept of revolution through theatre to those who could not afford to see it for themselves:

It is apparent, I think, to all people who are interested in changing the structure of society that the theatre is a medium of communication, and community revelation must get to the people who are not only economically underprivileged, but also fearsomely psychologically and culturally underprivileged. These people cannot really understand what the revolution is about until somehow their perception of things has been changed. This is the most important work we have to do now. (Malina and Beck, *Containment* 43)

The overall failure of the Living Theatre in America during their 1968 tour could be attributed to multiple factors. One, the Living Theatre was far out of touch with the reality that the college students were facing. Second, the Living Theatre's activism was contingent on their desires only. Instead of focusing on the struggles of the students who made up most of their audiences, the Living Theatre's performances focused mainly on insignificant issues that plagued them. Instead of addressing the police brutality or the draft for the Vietnam War, the Living Theatre cried out against the illegalization of marijuana and the inability to travel without any money. Third, the Living Theatre was "self-righteous," in the words of Gerald Rabkin (13). They touted themselves as champions against the status quo, but their performances came off as holier-than-thou to many of their audiences. Fourth, the Living Theatre's style of guerilla theatre was too aggressive. During one performance of *Paradise Now*, the audience loudly heckled the actors. The cast assumed it was because the audience did

not agree with the text of the performance, but:

As it turned out they only resented being screamed at. 'Why must you shout at me? Can't you just talk to me?' asked one... 'But I agree with you... why are you yelling at me?' demanded another, while others... wailed back, 'Don't scream at me, you fucking idiot! ...I don't hate you because you're black. I hate you because you're spitting in my face!' (Neff 110)

The Living Theatre's tactics of screaming to get their point across backfired. Artaud suffered from the same dilemma. In retrospect, both the Living Theatre and Artaud could have made much more of an impact by working to create a dialogue with their audiences instead of attempting to force action through their lambasting performances.

Just as Artaud failed to affect cultural change, the Living Theatre failed to achieve the political change they craved, but Artaud had influenced the Living Theatre's performance aesthetic, and the Living Theatre had an expansive theatrical effect on later American experimental groups and artists. One of these, Richard Schechner, a researcher of performance studies, established the Performance Group in 1967. The Performance Group took up residence in the SoHo District of New York City, creating performances in a garage that challenged the spectator's established beliefs on performance and the spectator/artist spatial relationship.

Schechner's performances were politically inclined; *Dionysus in '69*, arguably the Group's most well-known piece, was heavily injected with political commentary about fascism and the 1968 presidential election. *Dionysus in '69* was a devised adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*. *The Bacchae*, performed originally around 405 BCE, was centered around Pentheus and his mother Agave, who are punished by the Greek god Dionysus for their disbelief in his

divinity. The Bacchae refers to a group of Dionysus's female followers who are driven to madness and ecstasy from his power. The show was:

A series of ritualistic scenes, most relating to sexuality, repression, and freedom.

Dionysus was equated with a total lack of conflicting impulses, whereas Pentheus was eventually destroyed by violence-begetting repressions. Overall the production reflected the issues of the moment in its plea for greater freedom coupled with a warning against the dangers of blindly throwing off restraints. The production underwent many changes during its run, one being the adoption of total nudity for some of the orgiastic scenes, a feature which brought it considerable notoriety. (Brockett 402-403)

Dionysus in '69 did not take place in a theater; rather, the play was put on in a found space, a concept which Schechner named "environmental theatre" and one that Artaud had pioneered nearly thirty years prior. Schechner's "6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre," theories that he had published in the spring of 1968, were present in *Dionysus in '69* and echoed the work of both Artaud and the Living Theatre:

One. The theatrical event is a set of related transactions.

Two. All the space is used for performance; all the space is used for audience.

Three. The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in "found space."

Four. Focus is flexible and variable.

Five. All production elements speak in their own language.

Six. The text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no text at all. (Schechner 41-60)

Artaud's influence is scattered throughout these axioms. Artaud's vague description of a "new language" for the theatre was more clearly defined by Schechner. For Schechner, "one element is not submerged for the sake of the others" (59). Schechner's interpretation of this new language is to not focus on just one element. As with Artaud who hated the focus on old texts, Schechner balances the production elements or switches up their order of importance from performance to performance. For one performance, the focus might be sound. For another, the group might focus on the text. The sixth axiom is apparent in the fifth; the text, in line with Artaud's essay "No More Masterpieces," is not any more important than the actors or the technical elements. The Living Theatre's influence is seen here as well, as the text was never the goal of the production. Some performances, such as *Frankenstein* and *Antigone*, used the text as a base point, but later shows, such as *The Brig*, used devised work or established rituals to create performance. The influence of Artaud and the Living Theatre culminated in the performances of *Dionysus in '69*.

As the run of *Dionysus in '69* came to a close in 1969, Schechner developed "three rules of audience participation," which seem heavily influenced by the theories of Artaud and the aesthetics of the Living Theatre:

1. The audience is in a living space and a living situation. Things may happen to and with them as well as 'in front' of them.
2. When a performer invites participation, he must be prepared to accept and deal with the spectator's reactions.
3. Participation should not be gratuitous. (*Environmental* 78)

The first rule concerns one of the Living Theatre's works, *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*. *Mysteries* culminated in a finale that physicalized Artaud's concept of the plague. One by one, company members died in and around the audience, creating a "living space and a living situation" (Schechner, *Environmental* 78). Artaud himself dealt with the concept of living spaces, as his theories detail a desire to have the audience surrounded by the action.

In the spring of 1969, Schechner interviewed both Beck and Malina for *The Drama Review*, a theatrical journal that Schechner edits. Their conversation ended in Beck and Malina explaining an example of Schechner's second rule: a performer must always be ready to accept the consequences of audience participation.

MALINA: In Europe, it was more common to be treated aggressively. I have
been kicked, stomped, tickled, had my fingers bent back and my hair
set on fire.

SCHECHNER: My God, why, do you think...

BECK: To get her to move.

MALINA: To get me to move.

BECK: To get the corpse not to be a real corpse. (Malina and Beck, *Containment* 200)

Schechner was no stranger to unexpected audience participation in his own works. During a performance of *Dionysus in '69*, when Pentheus begs for a woman to save him from the wrath of Dionysus:

A woman came out to Bill Shepard [Pentheus] and satisfied him... And Bill got up and left the theatre with the woman. I announced that the play was over. 'Ladies and

gentlemen, tonight for the first time since the play has been running, Pentheus, a man, has won over Dionysus, the god. The play is over.' (Schechner, *Dionysus* 129-130)

In this case, the entire cast had to accept the consequences of audience participation and end the show.

Although obviously influenced by them, Schechner disagreed with Artaud and the Living Theatre at the most primal level. For Schechner, there is a vast difference between acting out within a performance and action in the streets caused by the performance. Theatre does not release violence or cause aggressive action from the spectators once they leave the theatre:

There is a question of whether performances excite or discharge violent feelings. My experience as a theatre director and spectator tells me that performances do both. They uncover hidden feelings, arousing them in the extreme. But this arousal does not lead to action, rather to a cathartic discharger and ultimate calm. Even when extremely worked up - as by the Living Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s - spectators did not seriously agitate in the streets. Rather they went outside to play. (Schechner, *Performance* 249)

As greatly as the Living Theatre desired their spectators to get out and make worthwhile change, the participating spectators stripped off their clothes and frolicked in the streets instead.

Schechner applied the theories of Artaud and the aesthetics of the Living Theatre and translated them into clear production elements. For example, Schechner's definition of environmental theatre blends the work of both Artaud and the Living Theatre. Unlike Artaud who focused mainly on the metaphysical and the Living Theatre who focused on the audience's activism and not their own, Schechner has begun to take the next steps in creating politically charged dialogue through which performance could lead to wide-spread cultural change.

Towards the end of the run of *Dionysus in '69*:

In June 1969, a small group of young people, led by some who had seen the play before, dragged Pentheus from the theatre. This time Bill [Pentheus] was comatose and a fist-fight almost broke out between Jason, acting on Dionysus's behalf, and several of the kids taking Pentheus out... I sensed a bad scene developing and, perhaps unwisely, spoke to both performers and audience. I explained what had happened, how rare it was, and asked for a volunteer Pentheus from the audience. Later I argued with the kids about what they had done. (Schechner, *Dionysus* 130)

Schechner paused the performance in order to facilitate a dialogue between the rowdy spectators and the cast. Although Schechner did not believe his choice was correct at the time, he still stressed the importance of a mutual understanding through dialogue between the spectators and the performers.

Discussion

While none of the three were truly able to create the culture-changing theatre they dreamt of, each has made a massive leap forward in the resistance against mainstream theatre: from Artaud, who conceptualized a society-changing theatre, to the Living Theatre who tried to fight back against the oppressive aspects of America, to Schechner who began creating dialogue with his audiences. Although the Living Theatre and the Performance Groups were not the only theatre companies working on political material, their great influence on American theatre can be tracked. For now, there is room for new theatre artists to continue the conversation with their audiences. Perhaps theatre and the society it serves can develop a common vernacular that both

performers and their audience members can use to protest on the stage and in the streets.

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