



Adassa Martins in
Diogo Liberano's
Symphony Dream,
Galpão Cine Horto,
Belo Horizonte,
Brazil, 2012. Photo:
© Daniel Protzner
www.danielprotzner.com

Up Front

TURNING TO BRAZIL

Tom Sellar

The protests sweeping through Brazil's cities in the summer of 2013 showed a nation at a significant turning point—just before it was scheduled to host the 2014 World Cup and cement its place as an ascendant global power. On one hand, Brazil's dynamic economic transformation has widely been portrayed as a mighty current. Resource rich and oil self-sufficient, its relative stability since the end of military rule has attracted global investors to its opening markets. The resulting boom has alleviated poverty for thousands of people and turned the nation into one of the influential BRICS countries (with Russia, India, China, and South Africa) motoring the world economy.

Nonetheless, angry citizens of South America's largest democracy took to the streets demanding an end to political corruption, to the neglect of public services (especially transportation), and to the inequalities diverting resources from the majority in favor of elite-driven building projects (like the World Cup). The deforestation of the Amazon, violence in the favelas where one-third of Brazilians live, power cuts, and controversial policing offer another narrative.

Given the nation's growing influence and longtime cultural vitality, it is surprising how little of Brazil's contemporary theater is seen in North America, telling any of these stories. Few of its writers, directors, and companies work or even tour here, despite an abundance of exciting voices and a new generation of artists. Perhaps language is the problem: the United States has many Spanish speakers and corresponding theaters, but Brazilian Portuguese remains an obstacle. Contemporary dance and contemporary art from Brazil have made their way into the international networks; perhaps theater can follow.

For this edition of *Theater*, we invited our colleague Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento to join us as guest coeditor. With her expertise, we selected four full-length plays for publication from among the many scripts she had assembled and translated with her student Fernando Lira in a dramaturgy initiative at Wesleyan University. We are grate-

ful to the esteemed literary translator Elizabeth Jackson for her devoted and nuanced work on these plays and essays. We hope they will be the first of many new voices Anglophone theater makers and audiences hear from Brazil.

Theater 45:2 DOI 10.1215/01610775-2849977

© 2015 by Tom Sellar

PARADISE REMIXED

Miriam Felton-Dansky

How often does any artist want anything as much as the Living Theatre wanted paradise? In 1968, when the venerable anarchist company first staged its landmark piece *Paradise Now*, it seemed they might just get the new world they sought. That May, their leaders, Judith Malina and Julian Beck, took part in the historic street protests convulsing Paris; by July, premiering *Paradise Now* at the Avignon Festival, the company caused such chaos that they were asked to stop performing the piece. In the two years that followed, the Living Theatre shocked audiences across Europe and North America with this riotous theatrical provocation, which sometimes lasted more than four hours and culminated in a street procession subjecting audience and artists alike to arrest for indecent exposure and disturbing the peace.

In the summer of 2014, a small company offered a eulogy, of sorts, for the Living Theatre that was, and for *Paradise Now* in particular. Komuna//Warszawa's *Paradise Now? RE//MIX Living Theatre*, which was presented during the 2014 undergroundzero festival in New York City, lasted a scant forty-five minutes (a fraction of the original's length) and played out on a bare stage with a scrim hanging downstage center. The "RE//MIX"—really more of a requiem—began with a meditation on what the Living Theatre might have meant when they called for paradise and what might remain of that paradise today, when the dreams of 1968 look ever more remote, if not impossible. A male actor leaned into a camera, with live feed playing on the scrim downstage. Sometimes we saw projections of the performers' faces, sometimes ghostly images from the original piece. No revolution came of such art, he mused, and all that remains is the art itself, and Judith Malina, then living in a care facility in New Jersey, and the question of paradise. Slowly, three actors used their bodies to form the letters of the word "Paradise," one of the iconic images from the original piece—but carefully, deliberately, with no hint of the original's frenzied ambition.

The past decade has seen many attempts to reconstruct iconic 1960s performances, from the Wooster Group's *Poor Theater* (2004), which restaged portions of Jerzy Grotowski's 1962 *Akropolis*, to the Rude Mechs' *Dionysus in 69* (2009), a full-scale reenactment of the Performance Group's famous 1968 environmental spectacle. (Komuna//Warszawa, a Polish group, is doing a cycle of "RE//MIXes," which range from John Cage to Dario Fo.) But this remix is different. The Performance Group dis-

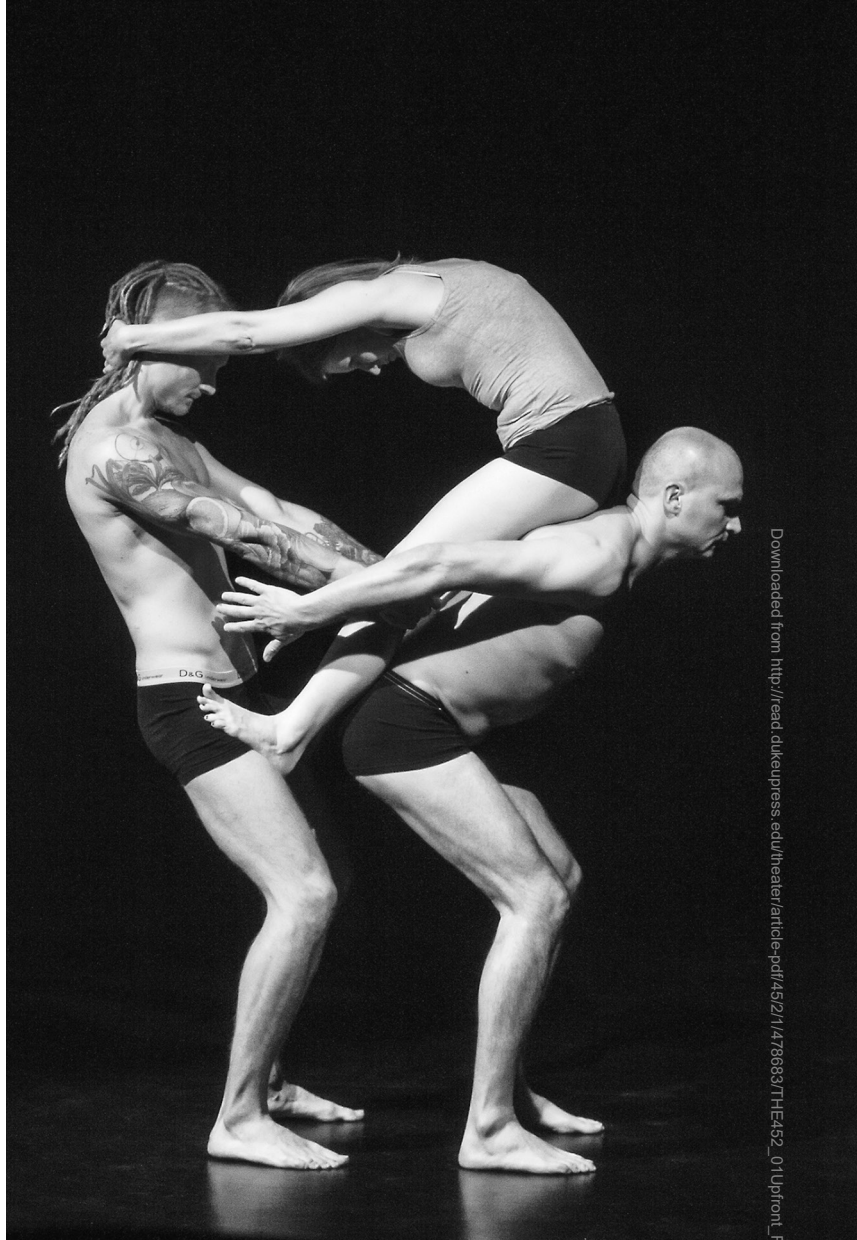
banded in 1980, and Grotowski died in 1999. The Living Theatre, on the other hand was, at the time, still performing. (Malina passed away in April, 2015, but young company members say they will keep the legacy alive.) At the very moment that Komuna//Warszawa was offering its remix of *Paradise Now*, young members of the Living Theatre's current iteration were performing *No Place to Hide*, an agitprop piece about surveillance culture, in outdoor locations across New York City as part of the very same festival.

Even if “the Living” might appear closer to hand than these other 1960s-era companies, their paradise has slipped further away. Komuna//Warszawa's “RE//MIX” was not an attempt to reinvent the aesthetics of the Living Theatre, or even to place a historical performance before contemporary spectators to measure the distance in real time and space.

Paradise Now? RE//MIX Living Theatre is a theatrical meditation on just how far we have veered from those aspirations.

At the heart of the remix is a section in which Malina herself appears on-screen, intoning the famous lines from the infamous 1968 *Rite of Guerrilla Theater*. “I'm not allowed to travel without a passport,” she announces. “I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana.” Propped up against a pile of pillows, the legendary actor-activist recites the lines calmly, without anger. These words become immortal, while the political anger they connoted has—apparently—evaporated or evolved into some other form. This, in the end, is the moment that Komuna//Warszawa marks. Two Living Theatres performed for two Manhattan audiences in July 2014—and neither came anywhere near to paradise.

Theater 45:2 DOI 10.1215/01610775-2850239
© 2015 by Miriam Felton-Dansky



Komuna//Warszawa
Paradise Now?
RE//MIX Living Theatre, Komuna//Warszawa, Warsaw, Poland, 2013.
Photo: K. Chmura-Cegiełkowska, Komuna//Warszawa

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/theater/article-pdf/45/2/1478683/1HE452_01Upfront_LF.pdf by guest on 22 July 2024