Project
MUSE®
Scholarly journals online

David Levine's *Bauerntheater*

The Return of the Matrix

Marvin Carlson

In the introduction to Michael Kirby's *Happenings,* one of the most comprehensive studies of this major experimental art form of the 1960s, Kirby lays out what seem to him the Happenings' most distinctive features. One of the most important of these features, and the one that Kirby uses most tellingly to separate Happenings from traditional theatre, is the abandonment of what Kirby calls the theatrical matrix. In Kirby's own words:

> In traditional theatre, the performer always functions within (and creates) a matrix of time, place and character. […] When an actor steps onstage, he brings with him an intentionally created and consciously possessed world, or matrix, and it is precisely the disparities between the manufactured reality and the spectators' reality that make the play potentially significant to the audience. (1966:14–15)

In opposition to this, Kirby speaks of what occurs in Happenings as "nonmatrixed" performance, a quality that such activity shares with a great range of activity outside the theatre, in the classroom, at sporting events, at a wide variety of public and private gatherings. As an example of the difference, Kirby cites a performer sweeping in a Happening and one sweeping in traditional theatre. "The performer in a Happening merely carries out a task," while the theatre actor adds the matrix of character detail and is placed within a matrix of time and place required by the dramatic action and reinforced by the physical setting (16–17).

TDR: The Drama Review 52:3 (T199) Fall 2008. ©2008
New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Kirby admits that there can be a mixture of matrixed and nonmatrixed performance at a single occasion, such as a circus, which mixes matrixed clowns with nonmatrixed acrobats, or even within a single performance, as when a stand-up comedian briefly assumes a character for a short monologue before returning to his real persona. Nevertheless, Kirby insists that the distinction remains clear and valid in each particular case.

Kirby's concept of matrixed and nonmatrixed performance proved extremely useful in theorizing action in Happenings and related performance experimentation in the 1960s and can still be a useful critical tool today, almost half a century after the development of the Happening as an experimental form. Nevertheless, a recent and extremely complex performance experiment by American artist David Levine opens up a whole range of interesting questions in the field of contemporary performance, among them a fresh perspective on the relationship between theatre, performance, and the matrix that has remained largely unchallenged since Michael Kirby's original formulation.

David Levine's *Bauerntheater* (Farmer's Theatre) project was one of the most discussed experimental productions in the German theatre during the Spring of 2007. During its three weeks of production (5–28 May) busloads of observers took a two-hour ride from Berlin to the rather remote location of the production in rural Brandenburg to witness the work, and, on weekends, to attend one of the official panels of theatre and art theorists set up to discuss the work. It attracted attention from most of the major German news media and even received a substantial writeup in the *New York Times*, which rarely reports on German theatre at all, and even less on experimental performance (see McGrane 2007).

The production took place in the town of Joachimsthal in a two-acre field adjacent to the Biorama Projekt, founded in 2006 by Richard Hurding and Sarah Phillips as a center for the study of the interrelationships of art, design, ecology, landscape studies, and tourism and located in the heart of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Schorheide-Chorin. The first phase of this project was the opening of an observation tower providing a panoramic view of the Biosphere, and an early 20th-century villa on the property is now being converted into a studio/artist's accommodation that includes a performance and exhibition space.

Audience members who arrived by chartered bus or car at the Biorama in May 2007 while the *Bauerntheater* work was in progress walked down the slight hill, upon which stood the tower and manor house, to a nearby field. For 14 hours a day, actor David Barlow first prepared the ground in his field with a *Reihenzieher*, a large wooden rake used for making seed rows when neither tractors nor horses were available, and then began planting potatoes, row by row.

Figure 1. (facing page) Actor David Barlow with period hoe in a Joachimsthal field, in Brandenburg, Germany. David Levine's Bauerntheater *project, 5 May 2007. (Photo by Joe Dilworth)*

Marvin Carlson is the Sidney E. Cohn Professor of Theatre and Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He has received an honorary doctorate from the University of Athens, the ATHE Career Achievement Award, the ASTR Distinguished Scholarship Award, the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism, and the Calloway Prize for his book **The Haunted Stage** ***(University of Michigan Press, 2001). He is the author of over 100 scholarly articles in the areas of theatre history, theatre theory, and dramatic literature, and his work has been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, French, Italian, German, Galacian, Portuguese, Finnish, Polish, Arabic, Slovenian, Slovakian, Spanish, and Turkish. Among his books are*** **Theories of the Theatre** ***(Cornell University Press, 1984),*** **Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life** ***(Indiana University Press, 1990),*** **Performance: A Critical Introduction** ***(Routledge, 1996) and*** **Speaking in Tongues: Language and the Theatre** ***(University of Michigan Press, 2007).***

Audiences came and went according to their own inclination, but what they saw was a part of an ongoing activity that at least in physical appearance was strikingly similar to the kind of real-life action that 50 years before would very likely have been called a Happening.

Levine, however, has conceived of his project in such a way as to "short-circuit the distinction" between the real-life action of the Happening and the matrixed action of the theatre. In an interview he explained that:

> If you come from theatre, you know that as soon as you perform an action—even getting shot—with a public in mind, you're acting, one way or another. Using an actor, acting, is a way of bringing this issue out into the open. It's a form of doubt (if it had been *me*, the artist, doing the farming, it would clearly have been an *art* project. But because I imported an *actor*, *acting* into the process, it becomes a project that, at least in theory, short-circuits the distinction. Because now his labor, his endurance, etc., are both *real* (he's farming) and unreal (he's acting). (in Rich 2007)

In fact, however, the short-circuiting in Levine's project is far more complex than the simple substitution of an actor for a visual or conceptual artist to perform a particular action, in this case planting potatoes, and it is at this point that Levine's reinstatement of the matrix becomes critical to the project.

Visitors to the *Bauerntheater* project are not provided with anything like conventional theatre programs, but a sign posted at the edge of the field Barlow is working provides the following somewhat surprising information:

> The man on the field is playing Flint, the main character of Heiner Müller's 1961 play, *Die Umsiedlerin* (The Resettlers). His movements, thoughts and expressions have been rehearsed in New York City. He is planting half a ton of potatoes.

Without this sign, or without visiting the accompanying project display in the manor atop the hill, a viewer could hardly suspect that what was taking place was in fact the second part of a project, corresponding to the performance, growing out of a previous month-long project in New York, corresponding to a rehearsal period for this performance.[1]

Surely none of the many previous Happening-style events, if they were rehearsed at all, were rehearsed in anything like the manner in which Levine and Barlow prepared for the *Bauerntheater.* The rehearsal period was in fact organized and experienced in a manner almost identical to that of a totally conventional theatre piece. For his experiment, Levine chose Heiner Müller's 1961 play *Die Umsiedlerin*. In America, Müller is primarily known as the author of *Quartett* (1981) and *Die Hamletmaschine* (1977), both far removed from conventional dramatic structure. *Die Umsiedlerin,* almost unknown outside of Germany and rarely performed even there, is both Müller's longest play and one of his most traditional in terms of dialogue and dramatic action. Historically, the *Umsiedlerin* were people of German ancestry from the eastern regions of the former Reich who were forcibly resettled in East Germany after the war because they were no longer wanted in the new Poland and elsewhere.[2] In the mid-1970s Müller retitled the work *Die Bauern* (The Farmers), a title obviously closely tied to the *Bauerntheater* project.

1. See David Levine's "Artist's Journal," his commentary on the creation and development of Bauertheater (2008). The *Bauerntheater* book, containing full-color images, excerpts from David Barlow's performance journal and essays by performance artist Daniel Wetzel, art historian Maika Pollack, theatre critic Thomas Irmer, and performance scholar Christel Weiler is available at Printed Matter Books, New York, and online at www.bauerntheater-projekt.de.

2. I am largely indebted for the historical background of *Die Umsiedlerin* to the excellent discussion of the play by Jonathan Kalb (1998: esp. 78–86).

The Müller project was not the first time Levine and Barlow had worked together. Levine first directed Barlow in a New York production of Lynne Alvarez's play *Romola & Nijinsky* in 2003. During the rehearsal and presentation of that work, Levine was impressed by how quickly Barlow, with no training in dance, learned to execute the steps. This led Levine to further speculation about the relation of actor preparation to other life activities. "I became interested in the idea of acting technique as a means of accelerated knowledge acquisition (i.e., is the technique good for tasks other than representation?)" In an email to Barlow he asked, "Can you sleep in character? Can you work in character?" (in McGrane 2007).

Levine then conceived the *Bauerntheater* project as a way of further exploring such concerns. He selected the Müller play as his grounding text, asked Barlow to play a communist farmer in the work, and began what on the surface seemed in most respects a standard New York rehearsal process. He arranged to have the play translated, hired a dramaturge, cast the play as if he were going to actually present it Off-Off-Broadway, and began an intensive three-week rehearsal period in a Brooklyn studio. Anyone watching these rehearsals would have found little to indicate that a traditional realistic staged production was not being prepared. Levine and his actors developed an extensive matrix following the model common in the American tradition of psychological realism as derived from American interpretations of Stanislavsky. Not only Barlow but also his fellow actors spent much time studying East German history and farming practices. They developed elaborate backstories for their characters and carefully developed psychological motivations for individual scenes.

Levine even employed the kind of attention to specific realistic physical detail with the play's imaginary matrix that has historically been found only in the most extreme naturalistic tradition such as in certain of the Shakespearian productions by Max Reinhardt, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, or Peter Stein, which utilized actual natural elements such as animals and vegetation. The Müller piece required no animals or trees, but the land itself was critical (the play's subtitle is *Das Leben auf dem Lande*—literally "life on the land," or more abstractly "life in the country"). In the kind of gesture that would have delighted any of the post-Antoine lovers of naturalistic detail, Levine in fact attempted to import a large box of actual Brandenburg soil for Barlow to work with his crude but authentic period tools. Not surprisingly, the United States government, fearing some imported disease, refused to allow this, and so Barlow arranged for a chemical analysis of a sample of the proposed soil and then had a large box of American soil (nearly two tons of it) blended to match this sample and installed it in his rehearsal space for Barlow to work with during the rehearsals.

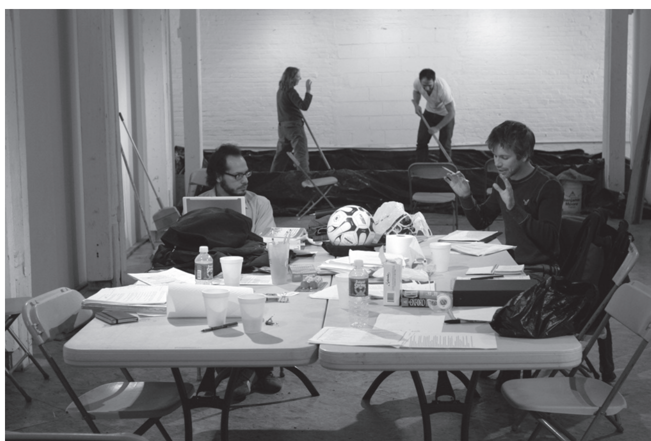

Figure 2. Actor David Barlow (right) working with translator Daniel Brunet while in the background dramaturge Heather Denyer and director David Levine restore the rehearsal field. Bauerntheater *rehearsal studio, Old American Can Factory, Brooklyn, New York, 28 March 2007. (Photo by Maria Gambale)*

At the end of the rehearsal period, when a normal performance would have gone into actual production, Levine instead paid off and dismissed all his coworkers except Barlow and ended that phase of the production. Barlow had now created a fully matrixed character in a completely traditional manner, but all of the matrix—the text, the nexus of other actors, the still scenically unrealized but imaginatively

Figure 3. Actor David Barlow practicing potato planting in the Bauerntheater *rehearsal studio at the Old American Can Factory in Brooklyn, New York, 29 March 2007. (Photo by Maria Gambale)*

created physical surroundings of the action—were removed, leaving only the carefully constructed psychological matrix within Barlow's mind as an actor. Even though Kirby's concept of the matrix is based upon the traditional theatre situation, where the actor's body is embedded in a physical and textual matrix, Kirby stressed the centrality of that body in a manner that has a surprisingly direct relevance to the *Bauerntheater* project. "When an actor steps onstage," Kirby suggested, "he brings with him an intentionally created and consciously possessed world, or matrix" (1966:14).

Kirby further notes examples of situations where the matrix can be extended beyond what would at first glance seem to be the fictive world of the stage. He mentions the "stagehands" who arrange the set in Pirandello's 1921 play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*: even if they are real stagehands they "cannot escape the matrix of the work." An even more extreme example of the extension of the matrix was provided for Kirby by the Living Theatre's 1959 production of *The Connection.* "Even when one of the actors in *The Connection* approaches you during the intermission to ask for a handout," he asserts,

> he is still matrixed by character. He is no longer in the physical setting of the play, and he is wearing ordinary clothes that seem disreputable but not unreal in the lobby, but neither these facts nor any amount of improvised conversation will remove him from the character-matrix that has been produced. (15–16)

One can think of Levine's experiment as an even further extension of this extension of the matrix within the body of the actor. He also takes his actor, "still matrixed by character," off the stage and out into the world of the audience. This world is not, however, the still somewhat liminal world of the theatre lobby as it was in *The Connection*, but a completely different space, a piece of the world with no previous relationship to the theatre, which becomes theatricalized by the arrival within it of an actor who carries his "intentionally created and consciously possessed" matrix with him. By performing a real-life activity—in this case farming—"in character," Barlow collapses back together the categories that, as Kirby pointed out, were separated to create the performative context of Happenings. The result is a more complex set of actor/spectator relationships than existed in Kirby's examples, and a situation in which the concept of the matrix becomes far richer and far more significant.

As important to Levine's experiment as his concern with the development of a matrixed character for Barlow to inhabit was the fact that Barlow did not simply take this character into a neutral, essentially nonmatrixed space to perform his activity. The Brandenburg field, although apparently a comparatively neutral area of open ground, in fact is a space with a very complicated set of interlocking associations or matrices. Although actually part of a working farm, it adjoins, as has already been mentioned, the recently established Biorama Projekt, and so, at least for the duration of this endeavor, became an extension of that operation. The Biorama Projekt thus provided one particular framing or matrix, or to speak more accurately a set of frames or matrices that provided a variety of perspectives upon the event. Projekt director Sarah Phillips lays these out in a very clear and useful fashion:

For Biorama Projekt, the *Bauerntheater* project is a perfect presentation of a Land Art piece. The focus of Biorama Projekt is to demonstrate art in the Landscape—when viewed from above (from the top of the water-tower), *Bauerntheater* is a beautiful sculptural piece in the Landscape, with the actor/farmer as the central object. When viewed from the ground on the edge of the field, the viewer has a completely different perspective of watching a man work, a creative presentation. It may also be seen as a performance, but the scene is not immediately obvious as a performance as it is a man working in the field.

> The Biorama project is also about providing a new perspective on the landscape—making people think differently about what landscape offers culturally and from a tourism aspect, which *Bauerntheater* does. It also crosses a number of bridges in that it brings the local/rural population close to a creative and cultural presentation as well as bringing the urban population into the rural landscape. (in Rich 2007)

Phillips's observations are extremely helpful in pointing out the close relationship between *Bauerntheater* and both Landscape Art and the Happening "a man working in a field." What is completely lacking in her analysis, however, is any acknowledgement of the other half of the experiment, the New York rehearsal, and thus the fact that the "man working in the field" or the figure in the Landscape Art piece is not simply a nonmatrixed human being. He is not an object among objects, as he would be in either a traditional Happening or Landscape Art piece, but is in fact a character from a play who carries that matrix within him as he works.

Figure 4. The building platform of the Biorama-Projekt tower, Joachimsthal, Germany, overlooking the field where David Barlow is working. David Levine's Bauerntheater *project, 5 May 2007. (Photo by Joe Dilworth)*

The Biorama matrix thus frames the *Bauerntheater* experiment in certain important, art-centered ways, but these do not in any way address the more original dimensions of the experiment. Much more important than the proximity to the Biorama Projekt is the fact that this farm is located in rural East Germany, in Brandenburg, the presumed location of Müller's play. In making this geographical move, director Levine introduced to his experiment elements of another kind of experimental performance, what has come to be known as site-specific theatre. The term "site-specific" has been applied to a very large variety of performances, in its most general usage to almost any theatrical performance utilizing a nontheatre space, but more specifically to productions created to in some way relate to such a space, to traditional plays presented in nontheatrical spaces somehow relevant to their imaginary matrix (like Max Reinhardt's staging of *The Merchant of Venice* in an actual square in that city), or to various forms of reenactments—battles and other events—taking place on or near their original sites.

Bauerntheater is related in some measure to all of these, but its manipulation of both a matrix and an imaginary world is different from any of them. It is perhaps closest to historical reenactments, where an actor appearing as, for example, Robert E. Lee or Oliver Cromwell, enters the theatricalized field of combat as a character already matrixed by historical memory. A somewhat different but related dynamic can be seen in historical villages such as the Plimoth Plantation or Colonial Williamsburg, where the actor "inhabitants" develop detailed backstories for the specific personae they represent. *Bauerntheater* falls somewhere between these two, since its backstory matrix is provided neither by history nor by the imaginative process of the actor guided by historical record, but rather out of the standard rehearsal process of creating a specific character in an already pre-existing and thus pre-matrixed work of dramatic fiction.

The rather anonymous Brandenburg field also provides a different sort of matrix than a Civil War battlefield or Colonial Williamsburg, since its emphasis is not upon the importance of its space to official history, but rather to unofficial history, particularly the largely anonymous and neglected history of the laborer. Clearly this is a matter of central concern to Levine, who has described *Bauerntheater* as a work "concerned with global labor markets […] with the representation of labor, with representation as labor" (in Rich 2007). In this respect Levine may be seen as continuing the exploration of such politically engaged experimental artists as Armand Gatti in France, who has created site-specific works not at the scenes of great battles or the deeds of famous leaders, but in the living and working places of the people. For one of his works, set in a factory, Gatti remarked, in terms that have direct relevance to Levine's *Bauerntheater:*

> With this kind of subject it's mostly the *place*, the architecture that does the writing. The theatre was located not in some kind of Utopian place, but in a historic place, a place with a history. There was grease, and there were acid marks, because it was a chemical factory; you could still see traces of work; there were still workclothes around; there were still lunch-pails in the corner, etc. In other words, all these left-over traces of work had their own language. These rooms that had known the labor of human beings day after day had their own language, and you either used that language or you didn't say anything. (1982:71–72)

Nevertheless, the Brandenburg field, though it shares with Gatti's factory a kind of anonymity as a location of labor outside the operations of the official historical process, still evokes that process in a way that points to another aspect of the matrixing of the *Bauerntheater* project. To return once again to Kirby's basic distinction, the matrix provided by traditional theatre, although it may be closely related to a general historical and geographical matrix, remains essentially fictional: Hamlet's Elsinore, Nora Helmer's Norwegian apartment, and the country houses of Chekhov and Turgenev are in fact imaginary constructs, as are the characters that inhabit them.

The situation becomes more complex, however, in the case of a particular type of play not engaged by Kirby, the very common type that deals with already known material from history, myth, legend, or even the dramatic tradition itself. Here the actors are involved not only with the matrix created by this particular play, as they would be with any play, but also with the matrix of its already known background—the matrix that surrounds characters like Mary Stuart, Joan of Arc, or Medea—whether all the elements of that familiar matrix appear in a specific play or not. When an actor comes onstage in this type of play, his matrix will certainly be "consciously possessed," as Kirby notes, but it can only be to a certain extent "intentionally created," since the preexisting historical or dramatic material necessarily imposes a matrix of its own.

By selecting a character from a play with a strong historical grounding, involving events still within the living memory of most of its original audiences and by no means forgotten today, Levine assured that his actor would not only bring with him the matrix developed during the intensive rehearsal period in New York, but also the historical matrix of the play itself. The

background of the play was the East German land reform of 1945. At that time the government took over all farms of more than 100 hectares (247 acres), as well as the land of war criminals, and divided this land into small lots (5 hectares) which were given to workers and the returning Umsiedler—the so-called "new farmers." These owners of small lots were generally forced either to work their land without animals or equipment, using only crude hand tools like those utilized by the farmer performed by Barlow, or become virtual sharecroppers for the so-called "middle farmers," with holdings of much more than 5 but less than 100 hectares, who had such equipment and animals and were unaffected by this legislation. Though not a word is spoken by Barlow in the *Bauerntheater* project, German audiences bring to the project this knowledge of his involvement with the Müller play as well as the historical setting of this play itself. Even though Barlow's character does not speak, his costume and much more significantly his crude and heavy wooden field instrument serve as clear signs of his placement within the historical world of the Umsiedler, just as an actress in a Restoration comedy by her costume, wig, and fan establishes her matrix for a theatre audience before she has spoken a word.

Eventually it became clear that these small farms were not economically viable and the government began collectivizing the farms in the Soviet fashion—creating other problems—but the play (and thus the *Bauerntheater* project itself) is set in 1946, when the problems of the new policies are just becoming apparent. The major struggle of the play is between "new farmers" like Barlow's character, forced to work their small plots with crude wooden instruments, and the "middle farmer" Rammler, who offers them the use of his plow-horse in return for half their crops. Although neither Rammler, nor any other character except that represented by Barlow, appears in *Bauerntheater*, this historical matrix, including even figures like Rammler who do not appear in the project, is still very much present in the minds of all German viewers. It is of course especially powerful in the case of viewers from the surrounding region, since this is their own history.

It might seem at this point that the recontextualization of Barlow's work of labor, the replacing of this Happening-like activity within a network of matrices—dramatic, but also artistic, geographical, and historical—would have reached a saturation point; but there still

Figure 5. Actor David Barlow marking rows for planting in the Joachimsthal field. David Levine's Bauerntheater *project, 5 May 2007. (Photo by Joe Dilworth)*

remains another context, another matrix within which the project operates, at least in the minds of its German viewers. I have been discussing the historical matrix external to the specific text but an inevitable part of the controlling matrix of an actor playing a character like Napoleon or Mary Stuart, but there is another sort of external historical matrix based not upon history in general, but on the history of a particular play. The original performance conditions of certain plays, especially plays that arouse controversy or major protests (*Tartuffe*, *A Doll's House*, *Ubu*, and *Hernani* are among the most familiar examples) have entered the cultural memory along with these plays, so that an aura of confrontation, even transgression, remains about them, becoming as much a part of their matrices as references to specific historical events or persons.

Müller's play carries with it a similar aura of transgression, and its stormy history is familiar to anyone acquainted with the career of this, the most significant German dramatist since Brecht. The play was created in a theatre workshop run by Müller and others at the Hochschule für Ökonomie in Berlin, a major training center for future party leaders in agricultural planning (see Müller 1992:160–87). Obviously the subject matter of the piece was directly relevant to the concerns of the institution, but Müller did not, or at least later claimed not to have seen it as making a political statement. Whatever his intentions, however, the opening of the play in September 1961 during the International Student Theatre Week coincided with the building of the Berlin Wall and a period of major international tension. The government saw the work as a pointed critique designed to call highly public and embarrassing attention to a troubled area of national policy and the official reaction was immediate and severe. The proposed amateur premiere of the work never took place. It was closed down after the dress rehearsal and the actors arrested, subjected to police questioning, and released only after producing extensive and servile self-critiques. Müller, on the advice of Helene Weigel and fearing imprisonment, also produced what he considered a humiliating and shameful self-critique, but even so he was expelled from the Writers' Union, which effectively closed to him all possibilities of either production or publication. The director of the production was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to hard labor, thus opening a level of very dark irony indeed in the backstory to Levine's claim of his project's central concern with "the representation of labor." For a German audience then, Barlow's character evokes not only the matrix of the Müller character and of the sociopolitical context of his activity, but also of the original actor of the role—a victim of the aesthetic oppression of the party just as his character was a victim of the social oppression created by party policy.

The most directly political of the project's matrices, those related to the specific historical background of Müller's play and to its historical reception, are the least acknowledged in any of the material circulated about the production or in the public statements of its creator and sponsors. Although Levine cites "global labor markets" as one of the project's concerns, it is not at all clear how this performance—almost all of whose matrices position it firmly in the mid-20th century and indeed to the specific East German situation—speaks to the very 21st-century concern of global labor. One in fact could argue that the performance itself has virtually no political dimension (a trait it would also share with most of the original Happenings) and submerges the political dimensions of a number of its matrices under an expression of pure physicality.

The statements on the implications and significance of the *Bauerntheater* project from Sarah Phillips and David Levine have very different emphases, Phillips associating the piece with Land Art and Levine not only with Land Art but also with Endurance Art and questions of "authenticity"—that is, to the tension between acting and real-life activity. Unquestionably the work relates in interesting and challenging ways to each of these concerns, but they are all formal or artistic concerns, a focus maintained in each of the four official panels organized around the experiment and dealing with live art, simulation, Land Art, and the position of Müller today.

Appropriately within this framework Levine evokes Kaprow and the "real-life" work of the 1960s (Rich 2007), and it is here that his reintroduction of the matrix—which his comments indicate he recognizes he has done, although he doesn't use that term—"short-circuits" the distinction made by Kirby and others. Without denying the originality of his experiment in those terms, however, its focus on formal and phenomenological concerns omits an important part of the project. Levine has commented that the project was carried out in the former GDR because the play was set there, but the farming activity Barlow is carrying out "isn't GDR specific; it's just what you do when you're poor" (Rich 2007). One can accept this statement only if one sees the project as concerned only with the question of the relationship between acting and living, or acting and labor.

In fact, however, the *Bauerntheater* project would be something entirely different had Levine located it in Nebraska, for example, or in the British Midlands. The dramatic and the geographical matrices he has chosen to use in fact introduce a good deal of the specificity Levine denies, and this is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the project's key term, "labor." Levine regularly invokes this term in his statements about the project, as a kind of neutral expression for a certain kind of intense and exhausting physical activity. He does not take into account that within the GDR, whose matrix he has utilized both dramatically and geographically, the term labor evokes far more than simple physical activity; it carries with it a wide array of political and social theory and historical reference. Physically his farmer may be simply doing "what you do when you are poor," but both his activity and his poverty within this context inevitably evoke the failed agricultural policies of the GDR, and arguably, the failure of the state as well. In more contemporary terms, analysis of this project should surely also consider the political implications of an American director and actor developing an American-based interpretation in 2007 of a GDR play and returning their work to former GDR soil for a contemporary international public.

None of this is to deny the importance of the formal, phenomenological, and aesthetic concerns provoked by Levine's project. In returning a dramatic matrix to the apparent neutrality of the action-based Happening, *Bauerntheater* has stimulated much productive discussion of the formal and artistic concerns that led Levine to this experiment. The project has also, however, raised equally provocative political questions, which Levine seemingly did not anticipate and which remain to be addressed in further considerations of this original experiment.

References

Gatti, Armand

1982 "Armand Gatti on Time, Place, and the Theatrical Event." Translated by Nancy Oakes. *Modern Drama* 25, 1:69–81.

Kalb, Jonathan

1998 *The Theater of Heiner Müller.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kirby, Michael

1966 *Happenings*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Levine, David

2008 "Artist's Journal." *Theater* 38, 1:30–51.

McGrane, Sally

2007 "An Actor Outstanding in His Field." *New York Times,* 20 May, 2:8.

Müller, Heiner

1992 *Krieg ohne Schlacht.* Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

Rich, Sarah

2007 "Bauerntheater and Biorama Projekt: Farming, Acting, and Critical Art" (interview). *Worldchanging,* 16 May, www.worldchanging.com/archives/006705.html (10 June).