

Nonviolence in Bologna

Judith Malina

Now based in Rome, the "Living Theater", animated by Julian Beck and Judith Malina, has been touring Italy for the last few years. These are fragments from Malina's unpublished journal.

JUNE 11, 1977
BOLOGNA

Early in the morning, we go to the offices of the Bologna Comune — to the cultural wing of the communist municipal government.

Mario, who guides us through the bureaucratic maze, comes to get us at our hotel. He tells us that the *Questura* is refusing permits for the sites for The House of War in front of the *Carabinieri*, and The House of Death in front of the church. . . He's an amiable man of about 45, handsome in that natty Italian manner, in formal suit and tie, and altogether in the old-fashioned style.

As we cross the *piazza* to the offices, we pass the corner under the *portici* where the hunger-strikers have chained themselves together — in support of those arrested at the closing of *Radio Alice* — where we had been made very welcome and promised return. The cause of the closure and arrests: they reported the recent street events, with minute to minute news reporting where and when the actions were taking place. Telephone calls received from the sites of police confrontations were transmitted directly onto the air. This made it possible for the demonstrators to be in close communications with each other, and for sympathizers to aid them, or to rally support. They are charged, however, with inciting to the actions.

The police received all the information along with the *compagni* — that is, it was always *public* information — if anything was inciting, it was the actions of the police which were being reported; of course, there's a deeper problem, of which we're all a part — and there's no sense for the people in jail to be the scapegoats for our collective failure to provide peaceful revolutionary tactics that work. In a corner under the *portici* at the doorway of the Municipal Building, they are lying on the sidewalk on blankets and sleeping bags. Posters around them, their chains visible around their ankles. . . We greet each other. I promise we'll return. But for now, we must go with the Functionaries and the Officials, the Police, the Church.

The offices of the *Comune* are in a palazzo of sumptuous murals, works of art, vases, statuary; the great hall, with splendid walls, ceiling, marble floor has a stairway leading to it that is made so that the horses, too, can enter, for in the old days, even the horses were *Nobili* and the pompous beasts entered the halls of their masters' houses. The *assessore* is friendly, bearded, young. . . willing, but worried. We must go the *Questura*. . .

Across from the *bello* palazzo is the white marble fascist-style building of the *Questura*. The captain receives us amidst his trophies. He's a sleek man. It's not for him to decide what can happen on the grounds of the property of the *Carabinieri*. . . or the Church. . . We must go and ask them. Julian says, "My Aunt Miriam would say, 'They're giving you the run-around.'"

Mario remains in the outer office — his political relationship — that is to say, the political relationship of the *Comune* with the police, is too delicate to disturb.

On the way to the *Carabinieri's* offices we talk, he and I, of the practical aspects of the Historic Compromise. Such as we now confront. Mario explains how difficult it is — to keep the balance with a police force that's politically hostile. . . "Until. . . for now. . ." The young people are too anxious to move too quickly. . .

The *Carabinieri* are in a palazzo. The colonel in his *army* khaki officer's outfit, is not hiding behind any modern art. He's got the framed photo of the President of the Republic and the *capo* of the *Carabinieri*. . . He knows we'll never get an ok from Rome as well as we do — and we don't want/need to stir up the problems that will ensue if our dossier is reexamined — our two expulsions from Italy, our many *denuncie*. . .

We go then with Mario to the *quartiere* San Ruffiello and walk around the *caserma*. We find a parking lot behind it, but choose rather a spot in front of some stores down the street. We settle for it, though the '*funzionario*', as he calls himself still has trepidations.

In the evening we rehearse in the writing salon of our hotel — a dark room with desks and an air shaft. There's a note from the *compagni* on the hunger strike delivered to the hotel to me and Julian.

"We are the comrades of Radio Alice and the Student Movement. We are on a hunger strike and are chained in Piazza Maggiore for the liberation of our comrades imprisoned for the March events. We would like to see you and speak with you. Come and see us tonight, or better we will come to your hotel. When? Where? Kisses. (The Chained)

The fasters are asleep. We walk among their sleeping bags to read the posters they have written:

3rd Day of Fasting.
Those in jail are on their 12th!

At noon in the Piazza Maggiore we meet with the hungerers. One of their placards reads,

JUNE 12, 1977
BOLOGNA

Who is hungry is good.
Who is well-fed is bad.
It's better to be hungry
than to be rich.
-Irish saying

Standing in their chains, they gather round us and tell us of the complex encounters they have had in their defiance of the police.

We go into a nervous rehearsal.

Maria Rosa and Billy fear that the police here may follow the recent awful precedent of attacking without warning and using tear gas at minimum, or worse, clubbing and breaking heads — or worst, at the extreme, using guns without warning. The dead in several cities attest to this custom. . .

The latest news arrives hour by hour: the strikers are moving to the *Due Torri* to avoid a conflict with the Church, which doesn't want them in the path of today's *Corpus Domini* procession. They don't want to rouse hostility of "the community" and they rather reluctantly make the concession. Julian's praise of their willingness to use such "strategy" relieves their sense of compromise.

It's strange that they haven't won the support of "the community," but as one looks at the vast Piazza Maggiore at night, and sees the hundreds (maybe 1500-2000 tonight!) or thousands of young people sitting on the steps, gathering round guitars, discussion groups, idlers, talkers — and all more or less Freaks. These aren't "The Community;" in fact, what we mean by community is just that: All the people who *aren't* these people — who *aren't* students, politicals, freaks, flowerkids, idlers, tea heads, new worlders. . .

And the prejudice isn't, I think, against the *incatenati* and their cause, but against the whole spirit of the New World, which seems to endanger their dearest concepts of how and what we are and should be.

The latest news: the *incatenati* returned to the piazza, they were taken in by the police, who took away their chains. Tomorrow there will be a demonstration in Piazza Maggiore. The police have given permission for it to go on from six o'clock till nine o'clock. And they have decided definitely to clear the piazza at midnight.

The demonstration is, of course, at the same hour as our Public Acts. I suggest that at the end of the Love House the Time Shaman announce that it is now time to proceed to Piazza Maggiore to participate in the demonstration in solidarity with the people of Radio Alice who are in jail, and that we then proceed in procession, perhaps singing.

Cos'e Radio Alice?
Cos'e la liberta d'espressione?
Cos'e la prigione?
Cos'e la liberta?

This brings up a terrific wave of fear. . . We'll be shot in the streets, without even being told to stop. . . they fear. . . Leroy and Annie and I say we won't be in the piazza at midnight under threat of a police attack. . .

In Memory of Francesco LoRusso. . .

Late at night we hear: the police agree to allow the demonstration to continue till just before midnight — then they may take action. The Living Theatre, however, is *not* to perform in the piazza — if we attempt to, they will make arrests. I'm personally prepared to do the House of the State with new blood lines for some of us.

JUNE 13, 1977
BOLOGNA

Much ado this morning for the preparation of the play.

We enter the police car and drive the whole route, pointing out each spot where we'll perform. Only the Church presents problems. They want us away in a hidden parking space; we want the Church as a backdrop. We settle for the side entrance, where a working class high-rise with perfect balconies for a new audience adds to the utility.

We return to the hotel. When we emerge from the car on Piazza Franklin Roosevelt, where we normally park, we see an armed force of extraordinary proportions. The men are not only armed, but holding machine guns and rifles at alert, carrying helmets and gas masks (?) and seeming to be mustered for action. I think there are 5000 men; Annie guesses 10,000 — in any case it's formidable. Isha whispers, "I want to go home," and clings to me. The way home is through the army. We walk in a group, talking together, as though we don't see them.

It's eleven thirty as we enter the piazza walking between lines of heavily armed men into a scene of innocent pleasures. There are only a few police scattered in the piazza, only as many as one would see on a normal night in summer.

The rest of the scene is almost Paradisial. There are people singing, talking, dancing, playing ball. . . A large white ball like a peace dove keeps flitting in a huge arc over the piazza. The women tend again towards soft summer clothes, and Indian cloths, linens, flowered skirts brighten the scene. We are stepping out of jeans. . . yet I notice sadly how many women are cutting off their lovely hair — yes, it's just and right that I notice it here, in the little circle of light surrounded by an armed force that could, that might, that stands ready to destroy their felicity at any moment.

Sing, dance and think of summer dresses: this is not the death dance of Antigone's city, this is the dance of *vita*. . . yes. We go up on the platform — Julian, Pierre, Annie, Tom and I. . .

I look out across the piazza — from where we are it seems full, even to the portals of the Cathedral. The church is half-renewed, and the cleaned marble gleams pinkish white like infant's skin, and the dark part seems like an evil mirror of its sinister. . . This polarity is especially keen here, because of this confrontation, and I can't imagine that the hearts of at least a few of the grim-faced soldiers weren't moved by the image of good and evil that the contrast between the two groups spelled out.



I'll remember the Piazza Maggiore in this particular light.

Looking into the faces of thousands of people who wanted to defy evil without violence. . . Julian praises them and tells them their theatre is better than ours — and yet they express disappointment that we're not going to perform — Pierre spoke his dramatic designation

. . . this piazza as the House of Violence
this piazza as the House of Hope
this is the House of Our Brothers the police. . .
this is the House of Our Brothers in *carcere*. . .

I didn't get to hear the rest because a young woman said to me, ingenuously horrified by Pierre's implications: "But they *aren't* our brothers when they shoot at us. . ." How could I say it succinctly? How can I answer her surely enough and quickly enough, the loudspeakers blaring, standing on the platform in the light. Everyone hearing the Martial Music.

The Martial Music — Silently Waiting. Drowning out all our sound. Annie takes the microphone and says some fiery words. . . There's a great *orologio* that's lit till midnight in decorative floodlights. Everyone's eyes travel up to it once in a while.

When our speeches are over, it's a quarter to 12. I promised Isha, when she was full of fears, seeing the fire-ready cops and hearing paranoid stories, that I'd return at 5 or 10 to midnight. . . So I begin to make my way toward the *orologio* where the street to our hotel is connected to the piazza by a sort of *piazzetta* where the Carabinieri are mustered. Here we spend a few minutes — Julian says: They say they are all leaving at midnight, but I think everyone wants to stay around as long as possible.

A woman from the *Partito Radicale* is talking about nonviolence. I'm glad to hear it proclaimed so loudly. "*Stanotte faremo Cenerentola!*" (Tonight we'll play Cinderella) cry the *ex-incatenati*. . . We sit on a little stoop behind the police.

At 5 to 12 the police leave the *piazzetta*, except for one who stays to guard some official's car. . . The others retreat away from the piazza.

I return to the hotel. We stand in the window and hear at midnight: a countdown, and at zero — no police, no attack. A shout, as of victory, went up among those who remained in the piazza.

But the hunger strike and the chaining action, that's all over — they've wiped out the street theatre, and the people of Radio Alice are still in jails — in different jails, in fact, to separate one from the other.

Show enough guns and you won't need to fire a shot. . . How many burned for that false precept? I'm sorry we didn't perform.

No matter, it's all part of a somewhat laggard but unflinching cultural revolution.

In the evening we hie us to Radio Alice. It looks quite the same as when we went there last, despite the dramatic events that have taken place there since.

The published tapes that record the entry of the armed police into the station while the broadcast continues live on the air, "They are pointing machine guns at us. . . Our hands are in the air; they are. . ." make drama of the little rooms.

Here are the *ex-incatenati* in their own environment. The only technician left among them fled Bologna yesterday, in fear of the police terror, and none of those present are familiar enough with the technology to run the sound efficiently, but they bravely muddle through.

The talk is long and moving. Moving because we are talking with people whose

peaceful attitudes and mentality is evident in all they say — more than that, even in how they move, their expressions, their language, their Reichian postures — non-aggressive people — but they are at the end of their tether. . . The murder of Francesco LoRusso, the incarceration of their fellow workers, the police fears that are tangible in the air, visible in the streets, evident in the bittering of the sweet faces. . .

All that we say — and we say all that we know — seems abstract to them in their concrete situation.

Long after we are off the air — after more than an hour of talk — we go on, the same as when it was public — searching for the possibility that we all want, but that they can no longer believe in.

JUNE 15, 1977
BOLOGNA

It was a good show in the Palazzo dello Sport. The police were obviously pretty uptight at the outset — frisking everyone that came in and searching all handbags — thus creating the atmosphere of fear and the insecurity/distrust. . . terror that later led to the fracas. . . Even the *Assessore alla Cultura* was frisked, feeling rather strange that this should happen to him at a cultural event that he was sponsoring, but. . . I sat, as usual, in the circle, facing the door and the agitation of the uniformed police was almost distracting.

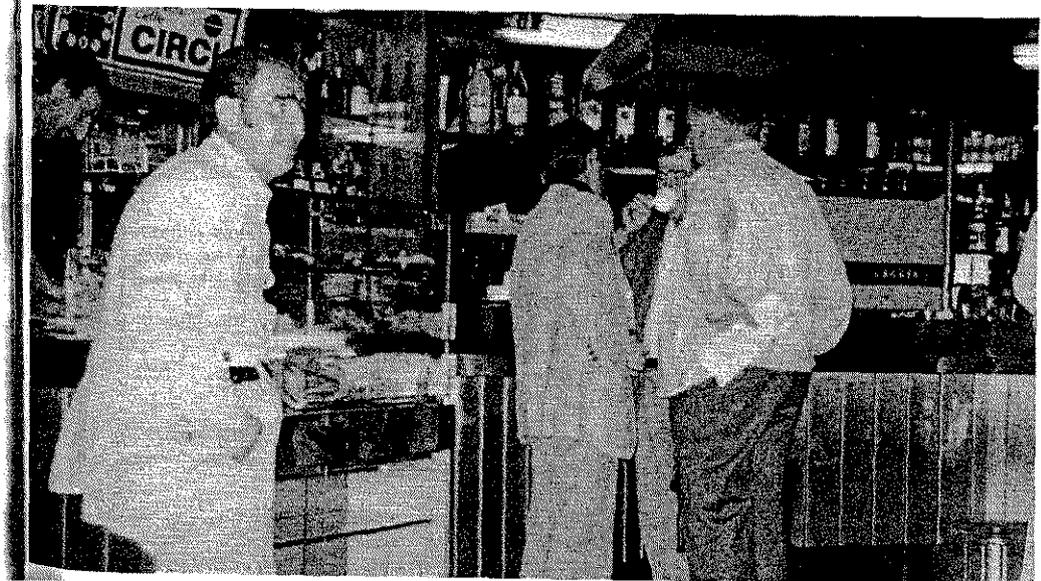
Great consternation in the Torture scene among them. . .

But all went well and I was in a good talk with two people interested in studying autogestion within a state-controlled school. . . I noticed Chris Creatore sitting at the exit/entrance rapping with soldiers and the police. . . I hear Sibilla suddenly shrieking. . . we look up — she's screaming with Malcolm in her arms — a circle of police around Chris; they are lifting him rather brutally and carrying him off. . .

I see Isha run towards them — soon all of us come running. . .

At first, we only demand to know what's happening, but get no civil answer. A plainclothes *capo* is directing the activity of the police, who respond like marionettes. A general shouting and confusion of protest results, and the more we are noisy, the more aggressively the police handle Chris. . .

We learn later that the origin of the difficulty was a demand by the police that Chris identify himself and he didn't do that, perhaps in the mistaken belief that our identity is part of our right of privacy in the face of the police. . .



JUNE 14, 1977
BOLOGNA

Alas and alack! Our identity *belongs* to them and we must give it them when they demand it.

They carry him a-ways and then put him down. He squirms under the heavy grasp, and the strength of his Tai-Chi-trained body, and his youthful vigor that defies curtailment makes it very hard for them to carry him.

And he shouts. And I shout and Julian shouts.

The *capo* orders him picked up again. We proceed another few feet from the stadium into the hallway that encircles it. Julian loudly demands from the *capo* what has happened — the *capo* says he wouldn't give his name and adds aggressively, "And what's *your* name?" And Julian shouts back. "My name is Julian Beck, and I am asking you what happened here." The *capo* orders the men to take Chris up again. We go down the hall; I'm shouting little moral lectures about the nature of violence that nobody wants to hear. . .

Isha comes shrieking along the hallway to Julian, into his arms— then out again, and to me, crying I want to go home. . .

Out in the rain, our bare feet in the puddles, I stand there with the LOVE and ANARCHISM texts in my hands. . . Trying to take Isha to the dressing room, running back into the fray after her.

They brusquely throw Chris into a police car. . .

Tom tries to get in to him (why do we do such things?) and then madly throws himself on top of the car — twice, he does this. . . And I shout at the police for being a bad example for Isha who screams when a second contingent arrives with shields and helmets and cocks their rifles, "They're putting *bullets* in their guns!" The cops drive away with Chris. All the police leave. We're standing there to our ankles in rainwater on a dark street.

Rehash. Blame. Plans. Self-reproach. Speculations. Not yet analysis. Chris will have to stay in overnight for an "*interrogatorio*" in the morning. . .

Julian and I feel we should have handled it better. It could have gone down calmer. I think it was only because we were on the high wave of the performance, our theatrical energy still potent.

Chris can't be "interrogated" — heard — till tomorrow. We try, but it's "No" all the way.

We perform without Chris. Leroy's the Victim. There are no police visible at the Sports Palace at all.

I had asked the Mayor if it were in their power to stop the police from frisking everyone as they came in, a practice we had never encountered anywhere and which set up an atmosphere of terror and bellicosity. But not even one cop tonight. . . Plainclothesmen everywhere.

Radio Alice opens the play, with a flute solo entering the opening meditation, followed by a letter from Alice to the Living which is a love letter. Read aloud in the concentration of the opening meditation it's very moving and sets a sad, sweet ambience for the performance which goes well.

Chris is still inside. We hear he's been beaten up.

We have one of those intense company talks, the kind that almost always follows group action in which there are arrests. Questions: Were our actions nonviolent? What is, in practice, nonviolent resistance?

On the street we are stopped several times and asked about Chris. Late in the day we hear that he was, in fact, pretty badly beaten. After the arrest, he was taken to the hospital — stitches in his head — the police say that he beat his own head against the wall! And the *Resto del Carlino* prints this! *L'Unita* assumes that he was violent. *Manifesto* and *Lotta Continua* support us. . .

In the afternoon we go to the Quartiere Mazzini, where we meet with a group for an "animation;" even as we try to set dates, the man from the Party tries to put up obstacles that are irritatingly stupid — and we're frustrated by his flak — but Julian says everyone saw this dumb tactic (I'm not sure).

A meeting on the piazza — a woman speaking ardently, but blurred by a fierce sound system. It's a Partito Radicale meeting about abortion, and it has called out truckloads of the different armed forces who are parked at each entrance to the piazza — the army, the Carabinieri, the Vigili Urbani, the Questura. . .

We sip our *caffè freddo* in the sun, calmly surrounded by this armed might, hearing the voice of a woman, telling passersby the news of our jailed *compagno*.

JUNE 20, 1979
BOLOGNA

Much consternation in the company that Chris is not released this morning, and they're saying tomorrow, maybe — maybe a few days — Ugh!

Everyone suggests different tactics. Fears of a bust if we act dramatically, Fears of Expulsion if there's a bust. There'll be a meeting about it tonight, after the Public Acts.

A good performance in sunshine in the Mazzini *quartiere*. Pierre makes a fantastic Blood Speech about Kim Sek Jong — orphaned by the American Army, adopted by Americans who re-named him Chris Creatore, imprisoned by the Bolognese police. . .

II/13 Photo: Matthew Geller, 1979



JUNE 16, 1977
BOLOGNA

JUNE 17, 1979
BOLOGNA