

# THE LIVING THEATRE

## In Brazil

By Paul Ryder Ryan

*"The theatre is in the street. The street belongs to the people. Free the theatre. Free the street. Begin."*

From *Paradise Now*

The Living Theatre came alive again during the Summer. A glimpse of the group's new work in progress, *The Legacy of Cain*, surfaced along with news that 15 members of the group, including Julian Beck and Judith Malina, had been arrested in Brazil.

*The Legacy of Cain* is the first major work by the group since *Paradise Now*, which had its world premiere in Avignon, France, on July 24, 1968.

At this writing, just past mid-August, the 15 members of The Living Theatre are still being held in "preventive detention" by the authorities in Brazil. A spokesman for the group said that under Brazilian law the group could be held until October 1 without formal charges being brought.

Three members of the group—Steve Ben Israel, Mary (Krapf) Mary, and Andrew Nadelson—managed by various means to avoid detention and returned to the United States in mid-July to report on the plight of the group, the circumstances surrounding their mass arrest, and their new work. The group had arrived in Brazil in the Spring of 1970 at the invitation of Brazilian artists.

At a press conference in the Elgin Theatre in New York the three members of The Living Theatre said that some members of the group, particularly South Americans, had been "badly abused" by the Brazilian authorities.

The arrests began, according to The Living Theatre members, on July 1. Eighteen members of the group were arrested at Ouro Preto in the state of Minas Gerais. The arrests, 13 in a raid on the house of The Living Theatre and five later on the streets, coincided with the opening of the Winter Festival at





*Julian Beck being led along a Brazilian "street."*

**Photo Carl Bissinger**



Ouro Preto. The group had been invited to premiere their new work at the festival, but their invitation was retracted without explanation shortly after they arrived in the city to prepare the work. On July 2, according to The Living Theatre members, the five who had been picked up on the street were released. But the following day, four of the five, including Julian Beck and Judith Malina, were arrested again. The group was booked on the charge of possession of marijuana. But the three members of the group who returned to the United States feared those still in jail might face charges of subversion. They said the group had been questioned about allegedly subversive material taken from the house, mostly the personal notebooks of Living Theatre members.

It is not the purpose of this piece to go into great detail about the arrests of The Living Theatre members. The basic details have already been given. As soon as the plight of the Becks became known, several international figures rushed to the group's defense, among them Allen Ginsberg, Alexander Calder, Jean-Luc Godard, Henri Langlois, John-Louis Barrault, Susan Sontag, Jean Genét, James Baldwin, and Jean-Paul Sartre. It is to be hoped that the members of The Living Theatre will already be released from prison when you read this.

What remains then is a short documentation of The Living Theatre's new work in progress and the Summer's troubles. We will begin with a brief description of *The Legacy of Cain* as given by Steve Ben Israel and Andrew Nadelson during several discussions.

**LIVING THEATRE:** *The Legacy of Cain* is a street spectacle. It was conceived to take place in all the different areas of an entire city over a period of two or three weeks. It is a spectacle of 150 separate plays, dealing with all the different functions of a city. The plays are for poor people, for banks, for factories, for public squares, for students, even a ballroom.

It is a spectacle that deals primarily with the topic of man's enslavement of man, and its various manifestations. It is an attempt at an exorcism of this enslavement as we know it.

We had hoped that *The Legacy of Cain* could be developed in Brazil and for Brazilians and that it would later be applied to other countries, to other cities, to other areas, depending on the functional needs of the city and its people. We thought that because of the great variety of economic, social, racial and political life in Brazil that it would be a very good place to develop the work. We had, in fact, intended to spend another year in Brazil, continuing the creation of the work and bringing it to full fruition. This was cut short by the arrest.

**TDR:** Then the work was not completed when you were arrested?

**LIVING THEATRE:** No. We were still in the process of creating the work; we were working on five or six of the major parts of



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the spectacle when we were arrested. We had done only three or four performances.

**TDR:** Can you describe these performances?

**LIVING THEATRE:** Well, most of the plays have no dialogue.<sup>1</sup> They are movement, sound and gesture. This has the advantage of avoiding censorship. One play ended with a cake that we had baked that was six feet long and four feet wide. At the end of the piece, it was eaten by the people who had seen the show in the square. The frosting on the top of the cake was a replica of the Brazilian monetary note—the cruzeiro. The reaction of the people was ecstatic.

Since we were also researching *The Legacy of Cain*, we felt that we had to talk to people about what their lives were about because we had never really been in contact with these kinds of people before. It was very exciting to meet these people, to be invited to their houses and to talk to them. As one studies a character in a play, we were studying the character of these people.

**TDR:** Do you think that in Brazil the authorities might have looked on this as political activity of some sort?

**LIVING THEATRE:** One never really knows. The thing is that we don't really think we were doing anything to make them (the authorities) feel that we were doing something that was *that* political or subversive.

**TDR:** Can you be a little more specific in giving a description of one of the performances you gave in Brazil?

**LIVING THEATRE:** Yes. One of the pieces we did in Brazil was entitled "Visions, Rites and Transformations." It was part of a larger section. We performed it in the city of Embo, with permission from the mayor.

It began with extremely long processions conducted by actors and about 50 theatre students. We had given a course in acting at the local university and five or six days after the end of the course we gave the performance.

The processions took place on many of the streets leading to the central square of Embo. We walked slowly, sometimes doing a rhythmic whiplash, and it took about an hour and a half to reach the square. All the while, we would be passing people with the look of *I and Thou*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Two of the pieces in the Cain cycle presently in partially written form are "Favela Project Number 1," and a subtitle under this section called "Christmas Cake for the Hot Hole and the Cold Hole." Steve Ben Israel asked TDR to refrain from publishing these pieces, which appeared early this year in abbreviated form in the Italian magazine Ubu, until The Living Theatre legal case was settled in Brazil.

<sup>2</sup>"The Rite of I and Thou begins with the Mantra 'OM' and leads to revivication through the union of two persons, an 'I' and a 'This.' The brain here is the source of power and inspiration, but the command for action is 'the command of the Guru from above.' This Guru is the Man in the Street." (From *Paradise Now* by Judith Malina and Julian Beck, Random House, 1971)



When we got to the square, there were perhaps 2,000 people waiting and we took up positions at six different points, enacting plays with different subjects, such as the State, Property, War, Love, Money and Death. These were plays without words, done in an Artaudian style, ritualistically and repetitiously. In the end, there was a transformation with all the actors tied up in ropes or chains. We tied ourselves up in as sexual a manner as our imaginations could invent. Eventually, the people watching the play unchained us and we all joined in a musical Chord of Liberation.

The next document in this series is a letter that the three Living Theatre members in New York said they received from ten male members of the group imprisoned in Brazil. The letter, apparently written by Hans Shano, an Austrian member of the group, gives a description of "Prison Play No. 1" and an interesting account of life in a Brazilian prison. It follows just as it was received:

Tuesday July 20th 1971

Dear Karl, Steve, Mary and friends!

Warm and wishful greetings from the beautiful holy prisoners in the struggle for liberation of the planet. We are not guilty and it is good to know this. We are really floating on it.

Last Saturday a week ago, we did Prison Play No. 1 in the auditorium of the prison for over 100 prisoners. We got permission for the first time half hour before we began. The chief of discipline of the prison camp asked Sergio and me whether there was any nudity or any of 'that subversion' in the play. I said: "None of this" and we called the prisoners personally and over the loudspeaker to attend the play.

We entered through the smaller door of the auditorium in the formation of a chaingang. Lined up one after the other in a double line we enter, walking the whiplash walk. The two lines part and walk whiplash-walking on either side of the audience until all spectators are surrounded by us. When all actors are in place after the last three lashes and the last screams we straighten up and face the spectators in silence. Then we begin to clap our hands, one of us after the other. After a while of dynamic handclapping all actors move towards and onto the area in the auditorium which we reserved as 'performingspace'. There we walk around in a circle, still clapping our hands. When the last one of us joined the circle we all turn inside and come together with our clapping hands. We come to a silence together and begin the Chord. After the Chord we do the breathing Lion, Lee's Piece and The Plague. The bodypile is being formed on top of a little white stage on the opposite side of the auditorium from the 'performingspace'. Usually there is a TV-set standing on it, the predominant obstacle of the development of man's own culture. We pushed the TV-set all the way up against the wall but still on the little white stage. The body pile was placed in front of a turned-



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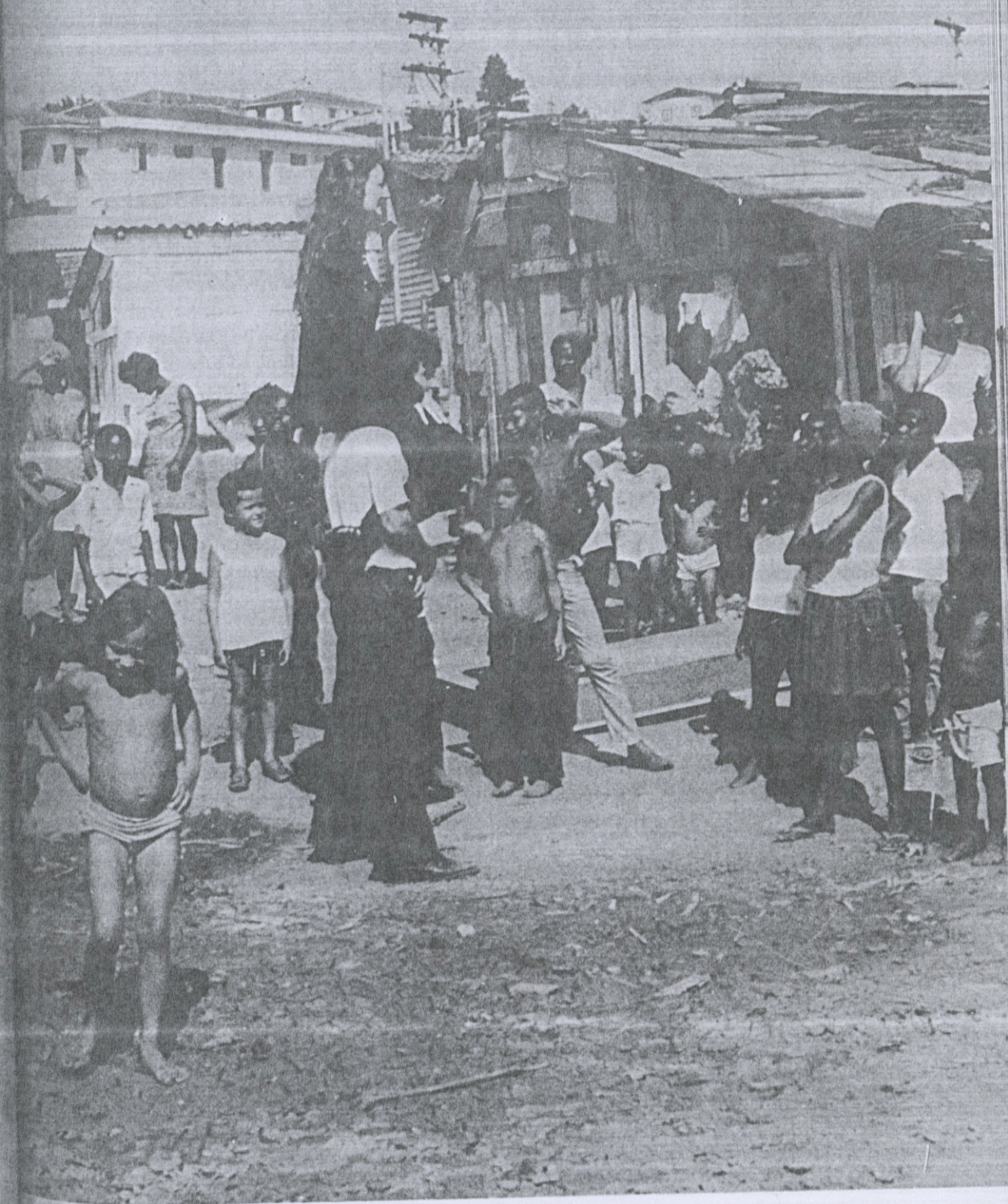
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*Living Theatre members performing in Brazil*

**Photo Carl Bissinger**



off TV set! At the end of *The Plague*, there were good as 100 prisoners left applauding and thanking us beautifully for having performed such an honest play for them. Many prisoners identified parts of the play with the tortures that man, and especially men who are imprisoned by the Laws of the State, have to suffer.

Saturday night we had a special service for our dead friend Jim Morrison (rock singer with the Doors group), victim of continuous persecutions.

The ten of us here, Luke, Roy, Jim, Bill, Ivan, Jose Carlos, Tom, Rocky, Sergio, and I are all in pretty good spirits. We still have our long hair (rumor reached the guards that it was insured for 6000 dollars). Our next play is a *Prisoners Dream Play*. I collected some dreams which are just being translated. Wow, is all you can say. These Brazilian prisoners really dream. From ten guys only one faked the story. All dreams show conflict. Conflict with authority I guess. They all show obedience, guilt and anxiety. They dream of making girlfriends, goods hidden in cupboards, their own fear to take them out, blackdressed cripples frightening them before the liberating act, no one offering them the goods in the cupboard, hiding under the bed when the dark cripple comes into the room, green corn, they take a bite, the women come, they throw things after them, the man jumps on his horse, he flees, he attacks, he defends, he is confused, he feels it somewhere, it gets stranger, he sees the sugarfield, he loses his horse, he buries his teeth in the good brown cane, the plantation owner comes charging, the plantation owner's son screams: "Let him go Daddy! Let him go!" And so on, lovers falling, landing in molasses and sinking, hundred fishes caught turn into one which drops into an aquarium and becomes smaller and smaller, always escaping the grabbing hand of the dreamer. What the man really wants is liberty but in his dream he goes after the content of the closet, even if it were to be just two packs of cigarettes which upon opening turn into sandwiches which the dreamer eats with the paperstring that holds it together.

Which brings me to think about the food in here. It is deadly neglect. At the most you get 15 grams of protein together daily. A man under stress, and prisoners are always under stress, should have 100-150 grams a day. All prisoners are deficient. Vitamins, minerals, proteins, other nutrients hardly ever reach the cells of their bodies. That means fast death and in some cases equals a death sentence because the man is kept from any possibility to offer his body the necessary re-creation of cells. It's an outrage, an atrocity, a crime bigger than any one man could commit on the outside of prison, it's mass murder. Keeping people from living. Letting them slowly starve to death and harrassing their tearing nerves and torturing their dying bodies which are yearning for love and peace but get the opposite with whatever they try. Only sometimes. Wunh! One man for instance was stolen 15 years of his life by prison. The day on which he was to be released, his body and mind were so discouraged and weakened that he couldn't get it together to leave. But his suffering soul quenched the truth out of the unfortunate: "You have eaten my flesh, now you must chew the bone!"

But not all prisoners are obedient dieers [sic] (Sterber). Some really



got the knack. One guy who'd broken out 5 times during the last 20 years and who stayed out for over 10 years in between, built himself a real helicopter out of a Lambretta and a Volkswagen. This flying seat took off with him in command, right over the wall. But when the other inmate who worked with him in the mechanical workshop of the prison saw that the thing flew, he got on too. Unfortunately he clung on to the steering pole vice and therefore the helicopter took up 300 m straight and vertically on the spot. Guards shot at the unidentifiable flying object but were luckily stopped before they got to injure the two men. The genius cursed all others from the underworld but it didn't help. They were too high up for the flyhiker to get out of the steering device. They had to slow down the engine and land.

Sentences are an outrage too. There is a man in my dormitory who was sentenced to over 3 years of prison in the recuperation colony. This crime only consisted of selling a piece of land on the moon, without a license and in the street. A piece of mooncountry went for 6000 cruzeiros (1200 dollars) and was to be paid off in several payments. The guy had only received two payments for 200 cruzeiros each, when he was put in jail. Three years man! They should have given him a medal and put away the guy who bought the moon.

By the way, after they got everyone to check out completely and sign, we were stuck into a prison called, Deposito de Presos, into medium sized rooms. There were no mattresses or beds. Our brothers inside this prison have to sleep on the floor. They are given a few very thin blankets. Some of them can't even find place enough to stretch themselves to their full length at night. There are up to 30 prisoners in one little cell. The ones who talked to me had been there since over five years, saying that they were illegally and falsely charged with activities which in any other country would be discussed before it entered a court. At night some of the prisoners were beaten by the guards. We could hear their screams and the sound of the baton injuring their bodies for 45 minutes. One of their our [sic] brothers was beaten by himself for 20 minutes. I woke up by the blood curling [sic] sound of the body telling his torturers that he was innocent. We spent only one night there. Then they brought us to another prison called Colonia Penal, Magalhães Pinto in Riberao das Neves, M.G. Here the prisoners are being harassed in other ways. They are locked up in two columns of double cells. Each column has about 56 cells. The prisoners are allowed sun in a grey yard for a few hours every day except Sunday when they are only allowed out if they have visitors. The rest of the time they are locked in, two by two. The ten of us were in Column B and I shared a cell with Luke after they took me out of the cell of the guy who built the helicopter. They read that lie in the newspapers about me being superintelligent and thought it better to break up my friendship with the genius to prevent us from constructing a telephone together with which we would have called in the Giant Walleater to crumble up the separators. On the 4th of July, Luke and I had a special Independence Day Service. Credentials were sent to us by airmail from across the hallway. The helicopterman, whose professional name is Jo Mandrake,



sent us the fresh-green messages from Alpha Centauri wrapped up in a newspaper article about a jailbreaker. We opened the windows wide to let out the answer.

By the way Brazil is really halfway back. People don't want to stand up for anything publicly. They want to do everything in secret. Live in secret, talk in secret, fuck in secret, whisper about making love in secret at the most. I think this is really, really deceiving. Surely they accept to live in lies, in public lies. Soon there will not be any difference for them in

others or self endangering action (which no one  
asks for anyway except authority)  
and safe and positive public support.

The second will be filed and categorized and looked upon just as if it was the first and will altogether go to the unknown, while everyone thinks indifferently about how good they keep their Freedom secret. Hallelujah!

I am glad that this is being realized clearly now.

I hope you got everyone's story about the arrests and following procedures. Would you do me a favor and add something I didn't find out until recently. Write into the part where I say that: Meanwhile I found out what the DOPS did to Ivan in separate rooms . . . write: After Ivan was given electric shocks the DOPS asked him to smile at them. He didn't and they told him that they "should put gasoline all over him and burn him to death!"

Imagine all the charges you could file against them. I got a fabulous letter to some Brazilian newsman but I didn't send it off. I think I let someone else write that. Anyway it's really mostly about how holy we are and how we make love, because they try to stamp us as perverts.

Now please, don't forget to write to all our friends to write to the judges, the police and the President M. I imagine that you have all addresses, my addressbook dropped into the kitchen fire.

Would you do me a personal favor and ask the secretary of the office to write a letter into the letter to all these friends saying that would they please also write one letter each to the Austrian Ambassador, Brasilia, Brazil, and write something good about me, so that they get respect and give me a passport. (We knew him since years, but he doesn't even smoke cigarettes, is artist cameraman, Nutritionist, Autodidakt, yogi & movement instructor, help him at once, the free world needs him, etc.)

**LOVE, RIGHT ON! Echnaton**

The last document in this series is a very moving, poetic statement that reached this writer in early August from Steve Ben Israel. It bears the type-written signatures of Julian Beck and Judith Malina. Israel said the statement had been sent out of prison twice to him as a signal of the Becks' intent to have it published. The statement follows:

*The Living Theatre came to Brazil because it was asked by Brazilian artists to help in the struggle for liberation in a land in which they described the situation as "desperate."*



*We agreed because we believe it is time for artists to begin to give the knowledge and power of their craft to the wretched of the earth.*

*Here in Brazil we have been trying thru the highest expression of our art to increase conscious awareness among the poorest of the poor, among factory workers, miners and their children.*

*The practice of our art in these forbidden areas has brought down on us the wrath of the forces of repression and we are now accused of subversion, in addition to possession of and traffic in drugs.*

*We are not suffering in the sense that 70 million people in this country who are daily tortured by hunger are suffering; but we are prisoners in the life and death struggle to liberate consciousness on the planet.*

*We appeal to our friends, our allies, for whatever help they can muster, so that we can continue to develop and practice our art in the service of those who are the prisoners of poverty.*

**Julian Beck/Judith Malina  
The Living Theatre**

Besides Julian Beck and Judith Malina, those members of the group who were imprisoned in Brazil included James Anderson, Roy Harris, William Shari, Luke Theodore, Thomas Walker (all Americans), Pamela Badyk (Austrian), Sheila Charlesworth (Canadian), Birgit Knabe (German), Hans Shano (Austrian), Sergio Godzinhos (Portuguese), Vincente Segura (Peruvian), Jose Carlos Temple and Ivanildo Silvino (both Brazilian). The women were placed in a separate prison, as was Julian Beck.

The Living Theatre has requested that, if they are still in prison as you read this, friends should send protest cables immediately to President Garterastazu Medici, via Col. Octavio Costa, Office of the President for Public Relations, Planalto Palace, Brasilia, DF, Brazil; and Dr. Arios Zido Pires, Avenida Joao Pinheiro 161, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

It was added that funds were desperately needed for defense and survival purposes and should be sent to: Paradise Defense Committee, c/o Beck, 800 West End Avenue, New York, N.Y., 10025.



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<p><b>Type:</b> Article</p> <p><b>Author:</b> Ryan, Paul Ryder.</p> <p><b>Title:</b> THE LIVING THEATRE IN BRAZIL.</p> <p><b>Citation:</b> Drama Review 1971 15(3a): 21-29.</p> <p><b>Abstract:</b> In the summer of 1971 13 members of the <b>Living Theater</b> were arrested in Brazil on charges of sedition and possession of drugs. The article contains a description of the actors' current work, a letter from the 10 prisoners who are still being held, and a plea for support from Julian Beck, leader of the group.</p> <p><b>Documentation:</b> 2 photos.</p> <p><b>Abstracter:</b> Dixie L. Crossley</p> <p><b>Language:</b> English</p> <p><b>Period:</b> 1971.</p> <p><b>Subject:</b> <u>Living Theater.</u>  <u>Drama.</u>  <u>Brazil.</u>  <u>Beck, Julian.</u>  <u>Art and State.</u></p> <p><b>Entry:</b> 18B:516</p>		
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