

# HALF6

Column door Loek Zonneveld, voorgedragen tijdens HALf6 op 12 mei 2015.

## **A wild girl ... eighty-eight years young**

**[ a small remembrance Judith Malina ]**

In art, in theater  
avantgarde-groups come and go like the seasons.  
Some of their founders stay very long.  
One of them was Judith Malina.  
She was the founding-mother of the Living Theater.  
Small and skinny, that's what she was in the roaring sixties,  
some fifty years ago now.

But my god, what a sound she produced!  
Her voice was far-reaching like a thunderstorm.  
Whispering, she could fill the intimate space  
of the Doelenzaal at the Kloveniersburgwal,  
just around the corner.

She could also make a big theatre-building like Carré  
tremble on all its foundations.  
That volcanic voice of hers, was part of the urgency and the anger  
in the productions of 'her' Living Theater.

With her lifelong companion, the painter, designer, director and actor Julian Beck,  
she was the living soul of 'the Living'.

Julian Beck was the born New Yorker of the two.  
She came from the German town of Kiel,  
and she fled, with her jewish family,  
for the Hitler-terror, and went to America.

Julian Beck and Judith Malina met for the first time  
at the Dramatic Workshop,  
a New York studio founded in the forties  
by the German expressionist and exiled theatermaker Erwin Piscator.

Marlon Brando was a pupil there, and so was Harry Belafonte, and Tennessee  
Williams.

Stella Adler was a teacher there, and so was Lee Strasberg, and the German  
composer Hanns Eisler.

During their study at the Piscator-workshop, in 1947, Julian Beck and Judith Malina  
founded the Living Theater, a performance collective, a solid group, making physical  
theater, based on the principals and thoughts of Antonin Artaud.

For years 'the Living' formed the center of the American avantgarde theater in the  
postwar era, together with Bread & Puppet & Open Theater and La Mama.

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'Theater is an open-handed, liberal and generous artform, full of intense experiences, somewhere in the no-mans-land between dream and ritual', that's what Beck and Malina wrote in the New York Times in 1957, to announce their production *The Connection*, text Jack Gelber, a painful portrait of heroine-addicts in the suburbs of the postwar-cities in America – based on free-style-jazzy improvisations.

Four years later they made *The Brig*, a shocking story about *one* day in a prison of the US Marines. That production caused a conflict between 'the Living' and the American authorities. The actors of The Living Theater were shortly imprisoned, then they fled to Europe. Where the group found warm homes and residences in several countries and cities - at the countryside in Italy, within the theater-worlds of Berlin and Paris. And ... Amsterdam, where they lived and worked for over a year, in the mid-sixties, just around the corner, in the Doelenzaal at the Kloveniersburgwal, by the way, a totally different building then.

As a nineteen year old boy I was fascinated by their work. And many were. Listen to the stories of Karina Holla and Anne-Marie Prins and many others.

The Living Theater productions were moving and exploding and sometimes pretty rough and cruel performances, like *Frankenstein* or *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*. They also played repertoire, like ... and there she is again ... *Antigone*, in the version of Bertolt Brecht. And Jean Genets *The Maids*, in an all male cast, so: maids without maids.

Their provocative performance *Paradise Now* was shown all over Europe (not in Holland, too many half-naked people perhaps?) and it was forbidden on several places, even by the burgomaster of Avignon during the summerfestival in 1968, the year of the anti-Vietnam-war-demonstrations and the student-revolutions in Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin and Prague.

After the death of Julian Beck in 1985, Judith Malina continued the group as a far forerunner of the later Occupy-movement, theater-in-action, action-as-theater. The Berlin documentary-filmmers Karin Kasper and Dirk Szuszi made a film about their work, their history and their worldwide influence, title: *Resist! – The Art of Resistance* – you will find the film in the library on the second floor. In 2006, the year that this film premiered, Judith Malina came to Berlin, to discuss about *theater and anarchy*, with the director Christoph Schlingensiefel and the dramaturg Matthias Lilienthal (the man who, next autumn, is the successor of Johan Simons in Munich). In that vivid discussion she, Judith Malina, seventy-nine years young at that moment, still was the most radical of them all, and: radical in everything.

In 2012 she published her diaries and memories as an homage, a written and printed monument for her German teacher Erwin Piscator, title: *The Piscator Notebooks*. In the introduction to that book, the founder of one of the other American avant-garde-groups, Richard Schechner, wrote: '*Judith Malina seems never to be tired, she is unfatigable, she is unstoppable, she still bursts of new ideas. She is long-living and long-working, she is optimistic, and in this second decade of the twenty-first century, she still is a wild girl with the radiation of a wise woman.*'

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**Judith Malina died last month in New York, at the age of 88.  
Old soldiers never die.  
They most certainly don't fade away.  
They just settle themselves in our minds and in our memories.**