

Journal, January 14, 1959

Julian Beck

My father, Julian Beck, co-founder of *The Living Theatre*, kept workbooks—in which he made journal entries—starting in 1952, just after he and my mother, Judith Malina, began *Living Theatre* productions at the *Cherry Lane Theatre* in New York's Greenwich Village. He continued these workbooks until his death in 1985, with a hiatus between 1965 and 1969, during which time he wrote the scripts for *Paradise Now* and *Frankenstein* as well as a number of poems in his “*Songs of the Revolution*” cycle, and his long poem *Revolution and Counter Revolution*. The sixty-plus original workbooks now reside in the *Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library* at Yale University.

After the *Cherry Lane Theatre* was closed by the NYC Fire Department for no reason other than anti-Beat Culture prejudice, they opened in a loft uptown at 100th Street and Broadway. Following a two-year run there, which was cut short by the NYC Buildings Department, they banded together with numerous performers, painters, poets, and writers, and constructed a theatre in the shell of the old Hecht's department store on the corner of 14th Street and 6th Avenue.

On January 13, 1959, the *Living Theatre* opened with William Carlos Williams's play *Many Loves*, directed by Julian, and the theatre itself was able to become a focal point for dancers, filmmakers, comedians, poets, and musicians to perform both in the company's productions and on the many “*Monday Night*” series that played out under their roof. Artists who later became identified with *Fluxus*, *Happenings*, *Judson Dance Theater*, and the downtown music and art scene performed at the theatre. The opening night in January 1959 signaled the beginning of a stretch of artistic valor that heralded the oncoming 1960s' cultural epiphanies. The journal entry published here is Julian's reckoning of that event.

Right after the opening itself, most of the cast, some of the audience, and a number of supporters adjourned to Julian and Judith's apartment on West End Avenue to await the reviews. All the accompanying photographs are from that wonderful opening night party.

Garrick Beck

Deus gratia, if I were no atheist; *Deus gratia*, although I am an atheist.

The theatre opened last night.

With splendor and humility and with emblems of success.

I am still thinking now of the applause and the embraces, the many curtain calls and flowers. The champagne party, the friends and strangers with their words of praise. It is like a blanket of comfort, warm, protective, all these things are a permit to rest, to breathe again. "At least we don't have the *inconvenience* of a flop," as Judith put it.

She was the heroine. She made the run, performed the difficult feat, defeated the opponents, like great athletes, she enacted the role, made us believe, transported us to another world, by the art she created, gave us, gave the audience, the vigorous feeling that we are all capable heroes.

The night, the OPENING—the emerging—night rose slowly and with never-changing time out of chaos, out of a tempo riled in intense hysteria. The time always insistently progressing, out of chaos and an atmosphere of terrible expectation, all nerves, all fright, all action animated by the love and fear of El Publico (Lorca), the people for whom one works and whom one wishes to please—I do not fear the displeasure of the people; I fear to disappoint them. The opening night rose inevitably into the light and in the noise of the applause, the shouts of bravo. I stood on the stage and at that remembered only and could hear only that other noise, the noise in the corridors, in the Tombs, that other deafening noise, a noise. Tho' I did not now nor then want to hear and could not get it out of my ears. I drained the noise of the applause. Judith and I kissed in full view of the public.

Try again.

The opening night, the night, night now, night itself rose through the darkness with magnificent inevitability. The night rose out of the darkness of chaos into dazzling light. Such poetry I had not experienced before, not in love, not in nature, not in art, not in passion. Never before did I feel nearer death nor more alive. It was as if every corpuscle of my existence had flowed always towards this night.

I am entranced by the mystery of the night. How mysteriously it happened, how strangely, tensely, agustly, it occurred.

Not Napoleonic, not Byzantine, not Papal, a different kind of history, alone, small, not grandiose, at best the detail of a gesture on the side of love.

The preparations go back to Nov. 1955 when the loft was closed by the Bldg. Dept. and we began to make plans for a new Theatre. More than three years of work and waiting. The two years of looking for a proper place. The five hideous months of fundraising and phone calls (five months over and beyond the two years which, less intently, had been consumed in the same process). Five months of disappointment—and we never did really have enough money and opening night showed a bank balance of \$85. (How quickly I have stepped over the two years during which we searched so desperately for a suitable place to be our home, disappointment after disappointment, days, weeks, months when it seemed we would never find a theatre, all those false alarms, all that waiting.) The agonizing and pale months of fund raising, those painful phone calls, \$10 here, \$10 there, and more often nothing, nothing, nothing. And the months waiting for the plans to be approved. Those were terrible times; and then, lease signed, plans approved, we set to work, a pilgrimage first—The Washington Peace Walk and then the work, the planning and the labor. Let me not forget this golden list:

The plans.

The old Hecht partitions we first tore down and all the plywood and 2 x 3 wood yielded with which so much was built.

Planning out the Theatre, where this would go, and that . . .

The long days and nights.

Scraping the windows, taking them down, washing them—a task more difficult than the imagining.

Breaking thru the 16" brick walls for our backstage door and main theatre door.

Tearing up the tiles from the lobby floor, scraping up the asphalt—Henry Proach slowly working his way across the room, weeks long.

Tearing up the seats from the old Orpheum Theatre.

Transporting them, truck-wise, lugging them up the stairs, oh day of agony. . .

Ordering the fireproof lumber for our stage and auditorium floor.

The tool cabinet.

The work table.

Removing the old Hecht doors.

The day I called the Building Inspector and first received him (Fill in those stairwell transoms!).

Shopping, ordering the bricks and gypsum blocks, and the *sand* . . .

The humid morning the heavy fireproof lumber was delivered, wringing wet and we carried it strenuously upstairs all those planks.

The months of June and July when we were without toilet facilities and had to run down to the local restaurant and bar.

And the difficulty in getting Joe DeWees, whom we had hired as plumber, to come in and do the work he contracted to do, the weeks spent trying to get him to come in and install a toilet.

The tussle with the landlord about the clogged drainpipes.

The error about the fire door.

Filing the amendment to our plans.

The Laura Perls Wall, the wall that separates the actors descending and the spectators ascending. The struggle to solve this problem, the solution.

Breaking thru the light window.

Preparing the Ray Johnson Wall. Scraping it; burning the stippled paint off it with a gasoline torch, sparkling it, sanding it.

Replacing the broken marble steps.

Breaking down the walls—for the main entrance to the lobby, demolishing the "Horror Area," superb designation.

The rubble, the rubble.

The endless amount of rubble, the boxes of it, the boxes and boxes of it.

The wineboxes, the cardboard cartons—by the hundreds—given to us by the Liquor store downstairs—which we used to hold the rubble.

The huge piles of cardboard that the separators inside these boxes made and which also had to be disposed of.

Getting Cardboard Men—old men who collect cardboard (forty cents/100 lbs) to take away our cardboard, piles of it.

Disposing of the boxes of rubble. The trips to the wastelands of Brooklyn to get rid of a station wagon load of such boxes. And another such trip.

Henry Proach.

And every night taking a box with us and leaving it mysteriously somewhere in the city, in some distant refuse barrel. And the paper bags full of rubble that we carried with us whenever we left the building.

Stuffing the barrels which were removed weekly—two barrels or three per week for \$5 per month—with refuse.

Refuse and more refuse, endless refuse.

That glorious day that Paul Williams arrived and with Dan DeWees framed the stage and auditorium floors. Magnificent carpentry, such carpentry as only palaces are made of. They framed the entire stage and the auditorium floor that day, the first of August. Larry said the stage floor ought to be made of Plexiglas so that the superb substructure could always be seen. About 60% of the plywood planking was also laid that day. Hans Hokanson and Al Saltzman helped, and a few days later finished the work. At night, leaving, the streetlights illuminating

the room, the light streaming in thru the newly shaven windows, we looked and gazed with pleasure and pride. It looked just like a theatre.

The fireproof wood had, of course, to be tested. The day after it had arrived, I had called the Bldg. Dept. and a supervising inspector was sent who stamped samples of the wood (large samples) and we then sent them to a laboratory at Manhattan College for testing. We waited nervously for several weeks for the result of the test.

And that very day, that great day on which the great carpentry was performed, and the stage and auditorium built, an order of 800 gypsum blocks arrived. It took us from 1:00 P.M. till 11:45 P.M. that night to carry those blocks into the building. We formed a chain, passing the blocks from man to man up the stairs, and Egyptian image.

The arrival of 225 bags of sand, 90 lbs each.

The laying of the first gypsum blocks, the dressing room walls, a kind of agony getting those first blocks level, in the heat. Later I was joined by Larry, building the classroom walls and we learned that, or I learned, that what I could do, two could do better.

The mortar cement.

And the bricks. The day 3,600 bricks were dumped on the sidewalk—what a noise—the day we carried them in buckets up into the building.

Sealing Hecht's, the doorways that had once connected the two buildings.

The plumb line. Mel. Mel's diligence.

The lintels, and the initial hole we made in the 16" brick wall, and how the wall showed signs of collapsing and how Hans Hokanson came and helped us set the lintels and lay the first bricks.

The books Judith got from the library on masonry.

Joe DeWees and his gang installing the initial plumbing.

Buying the striped awning fabric to upholster the Theatre seats. Unscrewing the seats, unscrewing the seat bottoms, upholstering the seats, cutting the fabric, stapling it, screwing the seat bottoms back on, painting the seat bottoms.

The search for a licensed plumber to cover Joe DeWees. Mr. Hunt.

Mr. Hunt's opinion of Joe's plumbing. Mr. Hunt's plumbers at \$25 a day.

The continuous search for money.

The trips to buy steel lintels. Setting the lintels.

The unending laying of gypsum blocks. We were building the pyramids. The unending laying of bricks to seal those walls. (The sudden awareness of bricks, the art of masonry, and, as I went thru the city from home to Theatre and back, the constant observing of brick work.)

The level. Keeping the walls level, that's the trick of masonry. Al Saltzman building the backstage ramp.

Al Saltzman and Paul Williams and myself making the twelve soundproof panels to seal the windows on the auditorium floor.

And Hans Hokanson sealing the two doorways into the auditorium now that we had broken thru the walls, making new entrances.

And the Theatre chairs. Painting them.

But first, there were fifty-five classroom chairs that had to be laboriously cleaned and painted.

But the auditorium chairs. They were old and filthy, the varnish coagulated, dirt and chewing gum adhering to them like a fierce disease. It was no matter of slapping them with a coat of paint. Process after process. Wash them, apply paint remover, scrape, scrape, scrape the iron work. Then paint, carefully applied, black, and then the three colors we had carefully selected to alternately pattern the backs. Only Judith could paint these properly.

The walls going up. More gypsum blocks to be ordered and carried in. More sand. Sand, sand, sand. You'd think we were planning a desert. But said Joe DeWees, this place is made out of water.

The great expense of the plumbers and the plasterers and the electricians.

The first news that the fireproof wood had failed its test. A second test and, weeks later, the news that that test had been failed. My mad attempt to get a third test performed—unheard of. After test two had failed, we were faced with the having to tear up the wood, sending it back, receiving a new shipment and starting in again. When the Inspector first arrived to saw off the samples of the wood for original testing, he said to me, "Any ordinary contractor would go to work right away with this stuff . . ." I pleaded at City Hall, and by a fluke got permission for a third test. The wood passed that test—we saw to it that it did. It was a nightmare. The day Paul Goodman, who was left to answer the telephone while we went to lunch, came running into the luncheonette with the news that the third test had been passed.

Sealing the elevator shafts.

Getting someone to put in a new skylight to fulfill a directive from the Bldg. Inspector

Putting up additional bannisters, again to fulfill a Building Dept. directive.

Replacing the chipped marble steps.

The Doors. Figuring and deciding what kind of doors we needed. Ordering the doors. Placing the door frames, levelling the door frames, cementing

them, drilling for them. The story of the 44" doors. Hanging the doors, obtaining hinges for the doors, attaching hardware, handles.

The plumbers, more pipe and more and more.

The last wall measured, built, the debris cleared from it. The maze the dressing rooms resembled.

The arrival of the plasterers, Joe DeWees and his gang: Robin, Papa Gene, Shirt. The incredible mess they left in their wake. How slowly they seemed to progress. We had to help them, we plastered, we carried, we mixed. The first brown coat (rough), the second brown coat, the white coat.

Removing the lights from the lobby ceiling and from the auditorium ceiling, moving thru the building with the strips of lights Sid Johnson made to illuminate the darkness.

The shipments of plaster, sand and "Nete."

Paul Williams hanging the sliding doors for the dressing rooms.

Paul Williams attaching bannister rails, Paul Williams making the steps for the rear of the Theatre, making the brass bannisters there, making the partitions and doors in the restrooms, hanging the doors one after the other, chiseling out a space in which to attach the hinge, step by step, Paul Williams making the Box Office Dutch door, and the Ticket rack and the extraordinary Kiosks, and the whole splendid marquee, making it and attaching it, Paul Williams installing a light on the auditorium steps—such a fine light slanting its ray on the steps, Paul Williams making and putting up the proscenium (great day) facing the front of the stage with transits, installing the light on the top of his kiosks, and advising us—the consultations and advice and his ability always to give an answer to a problem that really solves the problem, really simplifies the problem. Paul Williams giving us \$2,500 in July, and 3 thousand more in November and then in January another thousand. Paul Williams, eccentric millionaire, without whom The Living Theatre could never have been built.

Larry Kornfeld and Mel Clay and Henry Proach without whom The Living Theatre could not have been built as it was built. These three with Judith and myself made up the permanent unit that headed the production staff of the Theatre. We did most of the work. But then there were the hundred others who out of friendliness and the need perhaps to belong to some kind of community joined us in our labors—some for a few hours, others for days, weeks and even longer. Without them The Living Theatre could never have been built.

The search for an electrician. George Reed and Irving Schwartz, those two exasperating endlessly expensive workmen who drained us of our last pennies and

filled us with persistent anxiety. Yet George, weak, wishy-washy, did hang, almost single handed, the piping and the lighting for the Theatre.

Painting. The last white coat on the stairway.

The primer-sealer, the undercoats. The three coats of paint on the entrance stairs. The auditorium completely covered with black enamel. The tedious process of measuring for the stripes, and of placing the masking tape, and of painting the stripes, and the complications as the paint cracked and flaked. The endless retouching. And before that the large and dreary process of smoothing the auditorium walls, scraping the pock-marked surfaces, spackling, plastering, sanding. Oh Lord—.

Painting the lobby ceiling blue, the columns orange, the white enamel walls, the grey bathrooms, the black horror area, the curtain for the horror area, the curtains for the windows, painting the panels for the windows.

The windows that had been so laboriously scraped. Wiring them—Don Jackson and Bob Anderson—all that wiring, for an effect. Getting the colored gelatin—from Yonkers, melding the gelatin together to get sheets large enough to cover the outsized panes of glass.

Jimmy Spicer and Louise Thompson making the white curtains that were to back the windows.

Judith and Al Saltzman cutting the huge numbers that were affixed to the backs of the seats, painting the numbers (getting the special paint to paint them with) and then the delicate process of affixing them.

Attaching the seat cushions to the chairs and then measuring out the chairs and affixing them—a large job performed under Larry's direction.

Repairing the seats—all those old broken seats with missing parts—oh, and the earlier tasking—carrying the chairs into position from the lobby where they had been stored for months and attaching them in rows, a complex problem, a vast and heavy jig-saw puzzle—Larry's accomplishment.

The endless mixing of cement and plaster, measuring and mixing.

Amazing.

Painting the horror area black.

Al Saltzman making the dressing room tables and closets.

Preparing for the inspector, hiding the errors, disguising the doors on the
backstairs, putting in the doors in the dance studio.
The exit lights—a volume in themselves.
The Building Inspectors.
The Public Safety Inspector.
The Health Inspector.
The Fire Inspector (That tired morning recharging the old fire extinguishers.
Getting pick and axe, getting no-smoking signs).
The License Inspector.
The Electrical Inspector.
He was our nemesis.

All the lights, at the last minute, being put on separate circuits—enormous
task—lobby lights, dressing room lights—exit lights, restroom lights.

The agonizing period of delay during which our license was delayed. The
previews that we played without one, again like mendicants, as at the Loft,
begging for contributions.
And all the thousand details involved in perfecting functions and appearances.
The Certificate of Occupancy.
The crises.
The hearing Judith and I had to have to clear our air-raid record.
The license delayed for that reason.
The newspaper strike.
The preparation of the play and the production.
The casting, the publicity, the set construction, the costumes, the props, the
lighting, the coordination.
The rehearsals.
And through the long delays maintaining spirit among cast members.
Endless catalogue.
All the things I do not at this moment recall.

The opening night approached.
Sunday night the last preview over, we prepared for the event. “The Theatre,”
said Henry. The Theatre, itself, has an air of hushed expectancy.
The stage floor padded and covered with canvas needed to be painted.
The beautiful grey curtain (remnant of “Dr. Faustus”)—sewn by Jimmy and
Louise and hung from a track laboriously hung by Don Jackson and Al
Saltzman—would soon open.
Tasks all over the place. 45 hours. I had resolved not to let a night go by
without getting some sleep.

Monday proceeded well but for one actor who owed Equity \$160 in dues. They called and threatened to close the play.

The Theatre was being cleaned up—vacuumed, brushed, touched up everywhere.

The set was finished, every prop beautifully and dutifully put in order. All night long and all day Tuesday we cleaned the lobby floor and restroom floor. Months it had been covered with cement and paint and dirt.

We poured gallons of muriatic acid on it, the fumes were fantastic, and scraped and brushed and flushed and mopped. All day long I kept returning to this job.

Monday night I worked at attaching the gelatins to the windows.

By 2 A.M. that work was finished. We rushed into the street to see it but some wiring needed to be completed—it was completed about 5 P.M. the next day. Then the building glowed as we had all dreamed it would. And as I worked attaching the gels to the windows, I kept thinking of those hot days in June when we were scraping the paint from the panes, and now, at the last minute, I was making certain that that work had not been done in vain.

Oedipus fell. The large central puppet of the set for “Many Loves.” Danny, a sweet boy, painting the stage floor grey in preparation for an immaculate opening night, pushed the big beast out of his way and it fell off its track. I was upstairs on the third floor and Larry with the help of the others re-hung it. When I came down there was only repair work to be done. I was grim as I went about the work of repairing the set. I had thought that the stage work—my share in it anyway—was complete; I had relaxed in relation to it. Alas. This was the worst part of the whole preparation. I felt if I could get through that without going to pieces that everything would be all right. The focus of the set, a huge mobile, complex, and carefully arranged joint by joint to create a different effect for each scene had been badly damaged. By 1:30 A.M. it was fully repaired. I relaxed again and went about the work that remained.

Mel and Jimmy were cleaning the lobby floor. Malka and Jessica had been cleaning the auditorium. Now it was perfect: it would never again be so clean and ordered.

I proceeded to the Mural. We had wanted some kind of decor for the entrance stairs and Ray Johnson had been asked to do it. He agreed and began work but then suddenly—about three weeks before—had painted out his work and then had stolen away. It was days before we realized that he was not going to do anything further. I called him and he said, “It’s finished.” I was irked because he weaseled out and tried to imply that the white on white on the walls was indeed a finished

effort. It looked like a dreary entrance to a more dreary loft. I felt that he was reacting against the vast effort we were expending in the construction of the Theatre and against the care we were taking with each detail. It was born out of spite, this little trick of his. We were infuriated and felt helpless to combat him.

But finally, the night before the opening, I went into the hall and with gold size and gold leaf created a simple but effective mural—gold squares in white space, and it worked. I raced through it in a few hours, like some spirit who transforms places in the night.

The rest was details, details and the lobby floor. We drenched it with muriatic acid until the fumes drove us out. Over and over again, flush and reflush, flush and mop and drench and reflush. The floor—the tiles lay under a layer of hardened cement and plaster, what a process, laborious process, to get the floor looking decent, decent and white. Until 6:00 P.M. we labored at that.

Then only a few details.

Paul Williams and I both working intensely, insanely, finishing up problematic odds and ends.

Judith was under our collective care. We had removed all responsibility from her domain that she might concentrate on her role, prepare for her own effort and ordeal. We wanted to free her that she could concentrate. We had sent her home the night before at 9:30 P.M. to sleep, bathe, rest. The burden of the performance was hers now.

At about 6:15 A.M. I began to wash and dress.

Behind us were the creative preparations that lead to the creative effort which would be, itself, this night. Making the play, all the steps that any play must take, the office work, the casting, the rehearsal, the building of the set, the assembling of props and furniture, the setting of lights, the painting of the cyclorama and wings; all the details, the make-up, the dress rehearsals, the problems, the creation of the play itself.

I began to breathe hard and tremble imperceptibly. I was afraid my face, taut and pale, would reflect my nervousness, my terror, to my actors, and to the arriving audience. The members of the cast however were so impressed at my clean appearance, my opening night clothes, my shaven face—they commented on these accoutrements rather than the tense tight skin over the cheekbones and the glassy crazy looking eyes.

Everything was now in readiness. The air of hushed expectancy was so intense it threatened to somehow shatter, it was so delicate, we all trod softly as we went about remaining duties.

The formal elements began to gather. Telegrams and flowers began to arrive. Judith had arrived late in the afternoon and took hours preparing herself, putting on her make-up and dressing. A few friends and members of the company came into her dressing room with flowers and gifts. Both Mel and Lester brought marrons glacé. Judith had distributed the little silver discs, engraved, saying "Many Loves" on one side, the date on the other, to all members of the company. They kept thanking me. I went from actor to actor—I hadn't known what to say. At the close of the last preview I had spoken to them all onstage reaffirming my conviction that the play was a work of art and that they were all integral parts of it. I praised and encouraged and wanted to instill the magic of the creative feeling that makes a work of art, had wanted to instill this in the air and in the mind of each actor.

That was done. Now I wanted some charm, some phrase, some well-wishing word to give each player. I never liked the old traditions spitting, or "Hals und Bein brechen!" or "Good Luck!" or "Merde!" But in all these years had never been able to think of a substitute. Then it was as simple as a kiss—that was all, that would be my token. Actor or actress, the kiss was the sign.

Each kiss—Mel, Henry, George, Barbara—it didn't matter, brought me to the verge of tears and I took another dexedrine tablet to ease me down. The weeks of those tablets were producing their dire result and the depression pit was looming already.

The play began.

It is weeks later as I write this (March 7) and I can hardly remember the performance at all. I can remember standing at the back of the theatre, and funny details—such as noticing that the 2nd Act set was incorrectly hung at one point and rushing backstage to arrange for it to be changed—a block of wood was hanging in the exact spot where Judith, as Breen, performs most of her actions! I found a convenient spot and Larry changed it.

I did not mingle with the audience at intermission time. The last Act leaves them baffled, and the 2nd Act leaves them pleased, but still baffled. I would wait till the play was over. I don't even remember what I did during the intermission, nor where I was, nor what I was thinking. I remember Brooks Atkinson, powerful man, feared fool, rushing out at the false finish of the Doc-Clara scene, then

pausing on the rear steps as the curtains opened again and watching, from there, the remainder of the play. I remember feeling that this was a sign of success, for his word meant more than any other word. I remember, as the curtain calls started, telling Jimmy to go upstairs to Judith's dressing room to get flowers. I had planned the curtain calls with Don Jackson, our stage manager, "There ought to be at least five, maybe six, but here is a list of how they are to be run in case they go on as long as eight." I apologized for my optimism. I didn't want him to think me a fool. "We have had many calls in the past—'Ubu,' for instance, they were endless . . ." (This, tho' not quite true, could be considered a case in point.) On the seventh call I shoved Jimmy forward with the flowers. Judith came to the edge of the stage and Jimmy gave her a splendid splashing kiss.

It took two more calls before I was pushed and persuaded to answer Judith's call. And I got onto the stage and I tried to act with style—I felt my pleasure and my pride, I felt myself swell with amazement and delight—Judith and I kissed; there was still another call, and all that thunderous noise and that was when I remembered *The Tombs*.

It was more than I had imagined—all the congratulations. After the last preview, I had told the cast that I believed the play and the production to be a genuine work of art. I said it but I knew it was not altogether the case. And I could not help thinking that that was why we were having a success—because, in fact, it was not a genuine work of art. But M.C. Richards was wildly enthusiastic; and her enthusiasm more than anything else consoled me in this regard—if she thinks it is an achievement, then perhaps it is.

Great acting is a feat, a supra human accomplishment. The audience sits breathless watching someone do what it cannot do: don a disguise, like *Rosalind* or *Viola*, *Orestes* or *Herakles*, and ascend, transcend, see a glimmer of the truth, carry it back and hold it aloft, there on the stage, for all to see. Judith's dressing room was crowded with people praising her, congratulating, saying extravagant things. She had done something for them, deserved that praise—a moment of the truth (this world is so crowded with lies). And how many knew how really terrifying, how really risky, the journey had been for her?

Mrs. Williams—I had been afraid of her reaction—was full of words of praise. There is something so conservative about her whole manner, her appearance, her reticence, her Anglo-Saxon reserve, and her Yankee frankness, that I find it hard to approach her. But tonight she was enthusiastic—and very pleased with Judith. This had been a sore point, of course, because the Doctor, himself, had been opposed to her playing the role.

Paul Goodman was happy—this is a lot to say of Paul—and embraced Judith—he behaved as if his Theatre had made a success; and this was true, for it is also his Theatre. Curtis Thomas was there with a party including Margaret Coit. Dr. Williams had not come—there was a feeling that the event might be too much for his weak heart (I myself secretly believed that Mrs. W kept him away, not out of fear of his reaction to excitement and a success, but out of fear of his reaction, his anger, that result from a failure!). I was dry and dazed. Lucille Dlugoszewski, Maya Deren and Teigii, Dollie Chareau, Erick Hawkins, Julie Bovasso—quiet—it was not her night and she had been involved in the events that led us to the choosing of this play, and she had wanted to play Judith’s role—but quite sweet, Richard Edelman and his wife, Jackson Mac Low and Alexandra bursting with enthusiasm, Lester’s parents, who had loaned us a thousand dollars, many many strangers, Paul and Vera Williams, dear Paul and Vera—I threw my arms around them both—a bit to the surprise of each—but Paul had been the lodestar of the Theatre’s life, he had brought it to this moment and Jimmy and Larry and Mel and Iris and Malka and Don Jackson—all the people in the play, George Miller and the girls. And Garry. Garry yelling over and over again, “We did it! We did it!” When the curtain had closed for the last curtain call he had jumped on me and on Judith shouting these words over and over again.

We had opened The Living Theatre, after all that work. (Garry, chisel and hammer in hand, chipping away at the brick wall, Garry painting, scraping, pointing the mortar; Garry waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting around the Theatre endless hours while his parents worked, waiting for them to be ready to go and eat, or to take him home.) After all that work, we had done it and there was the gratifying feeling that not only had it opened but it was a successful beginning. And my mother and father, pleased and proud and relieved, too, I think, that their son had at last done something that one could point to with pleasure and pride. They need not regret this project—nor that they had contributed to its financial support so heavily. “Well,” said my father, “It took 33 years, but we made something of you.” And we laughed. They were both wild with praise about Judith. And, of course, this, this must really have made me happy.

I have written about the work, the physical work mostly. I like this. I remember coming out of jail and being dissatisfied with the prospect of returning to a life of Art. I wanted to do something directly useful. I fantasized various vocations I might study. What most attracted me were the building trades. I passed men working on the streets and I stared at them with admiration and envy, like a fifteen-year-old. Now I have built my own Theatre with my own bare hands, brick to brick, board to board, nails and mortar, and it gives me great gratification to have done so. Why don’t I write about the play, and the work that went into it?

Because that work—even the building of the set—was facile. No, not really so. I am forgetting. It was anguish, it was agonizing. But deceptive. The play, itself, seems simple, but is complex. The memory of the work that brought it alive seems simple; but now I can hear myself saying during the late rehearsals, “It’s impossible! This is the most difficult play I have ever done! I have never known a play to come together so slowly! And it’s so delicate. If something goes wrong in Act I, Act III is no good. It will not cohere, it will not cohere till every moment achieves a modicum of perfection, perfection; then this delicate fabric will become strong, like reality.” When it did cohere (and it did) at the final preview (and then only, not earlier), it had become a work of art, imperfect, I acknowledge, but remarkable.

The audience, that opening night, had not been treated to so much honesty in the theatre for many years.

Insanity, doggedness, relentless devotion, fevered passion, and the annihilation of the self (which produces rebirth of a clearer self) had made that evening, forced that evening, with pain, into being, had pushed it ardently, awfully, as a baby is pushed by those unrelenting, nerve pressing muscles, into the air, where with a shock, a slap (applause?) it breathes; so the play, and with it our Theatre, forced its way through the night and emerged, flowered, presumed life.

The image persists and the Theatre is still a child, and the play a baby. The Theatre will grow, and this is the first of many plays.

At our apartment afterwards, we waited and drank and got high waiting for the reviews to come out. The terrible dependence on the reviews.

A buoyant atmosphere pervaded; there was a feeling of exhilaration in the air, as if the very composition of the air held an extra balance of oxygen.

There was mirth and much laughter; people continued to say extravagant things about the play (things I could not believe; the play and the production are not that good); Allen Ginsberg knelt at my feet in homage—for what, for what? (He enacts the *true* poet always.)

I was tired, so little sleep, so much work, that I moved about like a somnambulist—indeed, I was one. In the back room the initiates assembled, and Lester acting as host, got higher and higher. It had an air of celebration to it, distinguished by the presence, at one time and in one small room, of Paul Goodman, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac (who had not been to the play but who, drunk and dis-

agreeable, had responded to the party call from Allen—Allen who had wept during the play), and Gregory Corso, and Ed Fancher, publisher of *The Village Voice*.

Paul and Allen entered into a significant literary quarrel—in full view of the audience. Everyone was quiet listening to Paul belittle Allen's work and begrudge him the fame and notoriety he is finding. In a way Allen provoked it by seeking from Paul some sign of approbation. But Paul was ready and waiting—all he needed was an opening. "I like *you*, Allen, but I don't think you're a good poet. Your poems are bad." "Well, not all of them," (Allen's reply) "Yes, all of them." Paul, altogether aggressive, Allen submissive, sympathetic. "For a few lousy lines you've been rewarded with fame and acclaim. I've written 20 million words of which one third will last, is really first rate, and I've gotten nothing for it . . ." The accurate words of the indictment I hardly remember now (March 30), and I was so drowsy then; but I remember Paul's jealousy, and the form of righteousness it donned in disguise; and I remember Allen's sweetness (Paul will not remember this) and his acceptance of Paul's diatribe, and his own embarrassment at his own position in letters. We all got very high, except Paul.

Earlier, in a grand romantic moment, Allen had greeted me, knelt at my feet in homage. I had brought the play to life. (What are they all so excited about? What had happened? Was it *that* good? I could not believe it. It had been difficult, but it had also been so easy. What else was there to do—and how could it be that good. A play is only so big and can only accomplish *so* much.)

The party continued. Jimmy Spicer took a car down and back to The Times Bldg. about 1:30 A.M. and when he returned (without opening a single paper!) Alexandra (Jackson's Alexandra) read Atkinson's review aloud. I had skimmed it and knew it was safe. It was a guarded review, but favorable, and it said enough good things, quotable things, to guarantee our success.

That is New York Theatre today. It is entirely at the mercy of the reviewers, and most important of them all, of Atkinson. Then I opened the champagne. Friends had brought it, had bought it and brought it, following the opening, but I had thought it imprudent to open champagne ahead of time. (Like a superstition. No actor, nor I, opens his telegrams before the performance—only a little while before had I finished opening mine.) But now it was safe. I cannot describe the wildness, the sense of joy, of accomplishment, of victory that pervaded everything. I began to open the champagne. But I could not open the bottles fast enough. Alexandra joined me, and, like a looney, began to shake the bottles to loosen the corks! It was a Bacchante. As the bottles opened the champagne sprayed into the air, into our hair, over our clothes; our faces were moist with it. Bottle

after bottle. In her hands was a bottle of vintage Piper Heidsieck that Judith and I had been saving for an occasion. But the cork would not respond to her mad coaxing. Impatient and no doubt divinely led, she broke the neck of the bottle on the edge of sink. Launched! Afloat! Wading now in the most expensive kind of champagne we kissed, we all kissed, rocked with laughter, drank, collapsed.

In the middle of the room stood Garry, in the middle of a night he would not soon forget, perhaps never. The little nine-year-old had at 2:00 A.M. run down into the streets, four blocks away to the newsstand to get *The Herald Tribune*. (We'd have stopped him had we known indeed the edition containing the review would not be in our neighborhood till 5:00 A.M.) His excitement, his pleasure, his boisterous pride—they were gratification enough.

Now the party could only grow tired, as it did. The Living Theatre had opened, and grandly.

What was it all about? Does this happen at every opening night of every moderately successful play? Surely not. Was it because a new theatre had opened? Not enough. Because there had been a lot of hard work? Not enough. Because in The Age of Dishonesty an honest event had taken place? Perhaps, and that is what I like to think.

I fell asleep on the living room floor with Judith. Then we stumbled into bed; and the night which had so insistently stolen in upon us was replaced by dawn. (April 2, 1959)

Transcribed by The Living Theatre chief archivist, Tom Walker. Special thanks to The Estate of Julian Beck.

JULIAN BECK (1925–1985) was an actor, director, playwright, and painter. In 1947, he and Judith Malina founded the Living Theatre, in their first two decades producing classics and contemporary writers such as Gertrude Stein, Pirandello, Lorca, Jackson Mac Low, Paul Goodman, and Jack Gelber, as well as the landmark avant-garde theatre works *The Connection*, *Paradise Now*, and *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*. Beck's books include *The Life of the Theatre* and *Theandric*. A volume of his plays *Prometheus/The Archaeology of Sleep* was recently published.



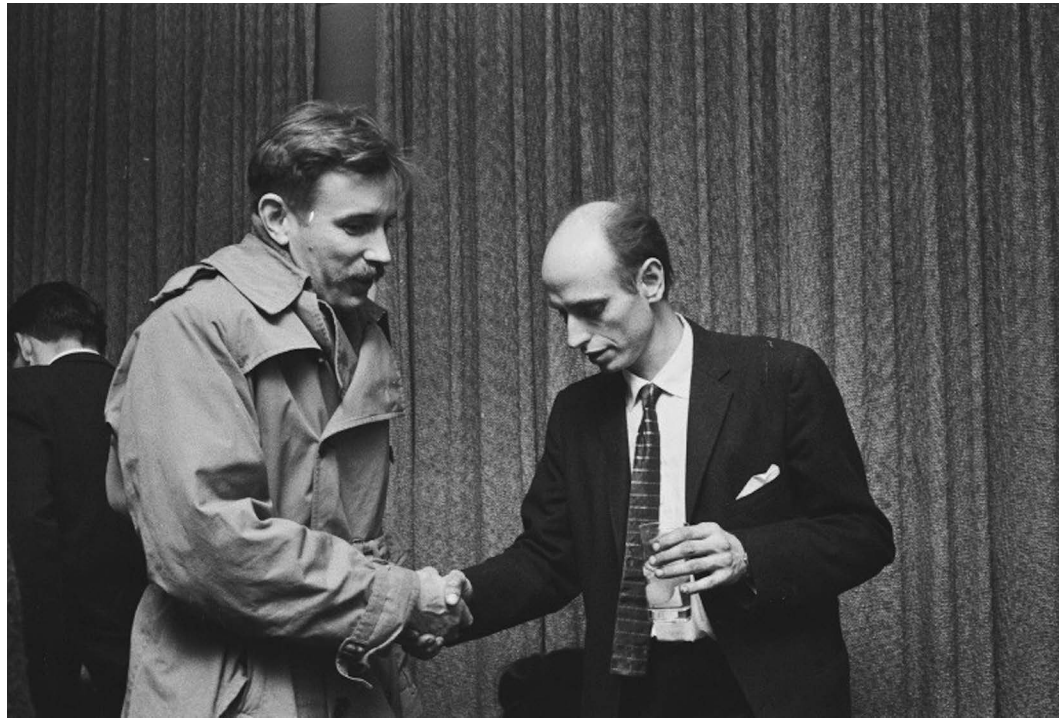
Kitchen of Beck and Malina apartment. From left, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, unidentified woman, unidentified man, Jack Kerouac holding cigarette. The broken champagne bottle Julian writes about in the journal entry is visible in the back on top of the fridge.



Living room. From left, Julian Beck, Jimmy Spicer (the Living Theatre's General Manager), behind him Living Theatre actor Mel Clay, Judith Malina, with the *New York Times* review in front of them, and with backs to the camera, an unidentified man and with bald head, Living Theatre actor Henry Proach.



Living room. From left, unidentified woman facing front, Lester Schwartz profile facing left, unidentified man in light sport jacket with back to camera, Paul Goodman with head cocked sideways, Living Theatre actor Murray Paskin, unidentified man seated at rear, unidentified man sitting cross-legged, unidentified woman standing facing right, Living Theatre actor Mel Clay, unidentified woman standing facing left, unidentified man with cigarette, and unidentified woman bending toward the left. All in front of Julian Beck's collage/painting titled, *Don Quixote*.



Top: Playwright Edward Albee shaking hands with Julian Beck. Bottom: Frederick Kiesler, architect and theatre designer, with Julian Beck.



From left, at lower left corner, barely visible Living Theatre actress Eileen Fulton, unidentified man with fingers raised, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and toward the back right, three unidentified people surrounding Gregory Corso.



Library room. Unidentified literati posing together to celebrate the event.

Special thanks to Garrick Beck for providing photographs and identifying captions.