

Workers' Playtime:

**an enquiry into the relationship
between Paris May'68 and the
development of British Political
Theatre 1968-1978**

Steve Smith

**The image on the page
between the
acknowledgments page and
page 1, the image at the
bottom of page 127 and all
images on pages 135-142.
Have not been digitised at the
request of the university.**

IMAGING SERVICES NORTH

Boston Spa, Wetherby
West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ
www.bl.uk

**ORIGINAL COPY TIGHTLY
BOUND**

IMAGING SERVICES NORTH

Boston Spa, Wetherby
West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ
www.bl.uk

BEST COPY AVAILABLE.

VARIABLE PRINT QUALITY

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of London
Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

June 2004

Abstract

This thesis examines how and why the revolutionary political and aesthetic theories articulated throughout Paris May'68, influenced the formal development and political struggles of British Political Theatre between 1968-1978.

In particular, the thesis traces how the radical philosophy of the Situationniste Internationale (SI), put forward in their journal the *Internationale Situationniste* and two key texts which informed the *événements*: Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), structured the idiomatic formal articulations of often diverse and antagonistic post-'68 political performances.

The thesis does not argue that political playwrights were always aware of these texts at source. However, it does suggest, that - as the British underground distributed Situationist-style ideas into the consciousness of the nation's counter-culture - it is appropriate to speak of the appearance of a *Situationist Logic* within post-'68 political theatre. At other junctures the thesis includes theories which reflect or complement Situationist writings indirectly, philosophy I call 'thinking-in-common'.

The introductory Chapter outlines the dominant themes and events of Paris May '68 and illustrates how the British counter culture assimilated or interpreted the *événements*. The Introduction also sets out the criteria for the theses' selection of plays, dramatists, and critical terms of reference. It also explains the genealogy and theoretical relevance of the concept of homology; a mode of analysis that underpins the rhetorical strategies of the whole thesis. Chapter 1 'Anti-Oedipus' makes a comparative analysis between Vaneigem's ideas about madness and those of the British anti-psychiatrists, using the work of the latter to establish its particular Situationist logic. Chapter 2 directly asserts how the syndicalist politics of the SI were assimilated by the May'68 Occupation Movement and then taken up by political theatre workers. Chapter 3 'Sexuality' primarily refers to the work of Reich, but is implicitly about the influence of the SI, for they were influenced by Reichian texts, too. Chapter 4, 'Culture', recognizes the SI as an organisation belonging to a 'utopian tradition' to make its connection between the comparative assault upon culture evident in post-'68 politicised drama. 'The Society of the Spectacle', Chapter 5, critiques the anti-spectacle gestures of political theatre exclusively through the work of Debord. Where the political or aesthetic gestures of political theatre owe nothing - or very little - to May '68, the work utilises the writings of the SI to demonstrate the importance and utility of Situationist theory *per se* as a valid analytic tool. In this way the thesis seeks to write back to political theatre with an explanation of its own codes and unconsciously assimilated Situationism.

The thesis also brings to bear a Situationist critique *against* the recuperated gestures of political theatre. The research project arguing that political theatre, despite its best intentions, may also be critiqued as 'revolution as commodity', a 'political spectacle' consumed and produced by theatre workers and audience alike.

Finally, because post-May'68 the form of a political expression came to be thought more political than content, the thesis concentrates upon how a Situationist logic is present in the radical forms and images the plays I have selected evidence, rather than their overt revolutionary utterances.

Introduction: Workers' Playtime

May'68: A Well Cited Political Watershed	1-4
The Revolution of Everyday Life: Neither Washington nor Moscow	5-8
The Strasbourg Pamphlet: The Revolution Detonated	8-9
The May'68 événements	10-15
Enragés and Contestation	15-17
Radical Gestures	17-18
Situationism and Britain	18-23
The Occupation Movement in London	23-25
May'68 and the Radical Gestures of Political Theatre	25-33
Situationism, Homology, and Political Theatre	33-41
Structural Coincidences and the Reader	41-43
Situationism vis a vis Political Theatre	43-45
Clusters, Symptoms, and Identification	46-49

Chapter 1: Anti-Oedipal Theatre

A Festival of Madness	50-52
A Celebration of the Schizophrenic	52-56
Anti-Psychiatry	56-60
Anti-Oedipal theatre	60-64
Anti-Oedipal form	64-68
Artaud for Artaud's Sake	68-72
The Anti-Oedipal Anti-Oedipalist	72-77
Playpower	77-81
"Power to the Imagination"	81-84
Alternative Currents	85-89
Alternative or Direct Power	90-93

Chapter 2: Political Theatre and The Occupations Movement

The Return of Syndicalism: Georg Sorel and the Occupation Movement	94-99
Political Theatre Seized the Means of Production	99-104
A "How-to" Lesson in Occupation	104-105

Anti-Stalinist Theatre: ("Down with Stalinist Dead Meat!")	106-112
"The [political] difference in style to which Viénet here refers, is here obvious"	113-117
Inside - Outside: Theatre Occupied by the Factory	117-120
The Night of the Barricades	120-126
Comics: 'a proletarian form of graphic' - 'the only truly popular literature of our century'	127-131
<i>Fin</i> The Theatre	131-134
Illustrations	135-142

Chapter 3: Sexuality

The Sexual Revolution: A New Progressive Mood	143-145
Sexual Utopianism	145-148
Anti-Utopian Sexuality	148-149
The Sexual Revolution: Postponed	149-152
Orgasmotheatre	152-154
The Publicity of Misery v The Misery of Publicity	154-162
The Joy of Sex	162-164
Sexual Chaos	164-168
Another Reversal of Perspective: Sexual Politics; The New Economy – "Everyone is a Prostitute"	168-173
Red Fascists	173-175

Chapter 4: Culture

Introduction: Utilitarian Theatre - 'The Social Value' of Pop Music	176-181
Demonstrating: The Voice of the People	181-184
Cultural Graffiti: The Defacement of Theatre	184-191
Creating Situationist Situations: Theatre Dérive	191-200
Intermedialism: A New-Found Culture?	200-205
Cultural Modifications	205-209

Political Theatre For Culture: 'You can't really like this shit can you?'	209-216
--	---------

Chapter 5: The Society of the Spectacle

Introduction: Guy Debord and The Society of the Spectacle	217-222
Spectacle-Busting/Exposing the Public Figure	222-225
Breaking the Illusion: Forms	226
Television: Visual and Political Equivalence	226-232
Material v Abstract Show: ('Getting it real')	232-237
The Bare-Stage Strategy	238-240
Disrupting the Show - Attacking the Spectator	241-248
Learning to Read	248-253

Workers' Playtime: Conclusion	254-256
--------------------------------------	----------------

Glossary	257-262
-----------------	----------------

Epigraph, End Notes	263
----------------------------	------------

Bibliography	264-267
---------------------	----------------

A truly democratic society would aim, as a matter of principle, to enlarge and diversify the sign capacities and resources of its members... Only in such a society would semiotics be given a basic place in the educational process, so that the individual would be prepared to resist the exploitation of himself by other users of signs, to avoid pathic signs in his behaviour, and to make his contribution to the constant correction and creation of signs upon which a healthy society depends. **Charles Morris**

Acknowledgements

I would first of all like to thank whoever, or whatever logic, informed the old Polytechnic of North London's social and political determination to invite students and workers from non-traditional backgrounds into the field of elitist education. Secondly I want to offer a note of appreciation to Dan Monck who, in taking me to the now renamed University of North London to teach Foundry Technology, put the idea in my head to be a student in the first place. I would also seek to pass on a word of gratitude to Dr Wendy Wheeler, whose 'Postmodernism' unit kick-started my intellectual education. I would also like to thank Dr Carolyn Burdett who has always said the most kind and supportive things one could ask for as a student. For supporting my postgraduate career and pursuit of funding and further education, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Laurie Wolf, but in particular to Dr Cornelia Cook who has never ceased from backing me. Thanks also to people who have helped research: Dartington College Library and Amanda, and thanks to Jason for help with the graphics at the bitter end. Two people who offered simple support, encouragement, and enthusiasm need a mention, too: thanks Duncan and Helen. Academically, I owe much to Dr Colin Counsell, For over ten years he has never lost faith in what I could achieve; his support and guidance has been an inspiration and source of constant encouragement. Finally, I want to thank Jan, my partner, whose personality, intelligence and love has made me finish what I started, without which I would have often faltered.

Workers' Playtime: Introduction

1968 is always remembered as the historic year. May 1968 is always remembered as the historic month. Indeed, for that one month events in France, and particularly in Paris, echoed great historic moments of the past...May 1968 seemed to almost all observers to hold the promise of a definitive change in government and society: politicians expected the end of the Gaullist regime, students and radicals expected a root-and-branch reformation of society, for it did appear that in universities, in theatres, in factories, in the offices of professional societies, the representatives of the alternative society were taking power. It was all over rather quickly in France; in a hastily organised general election the French people edged slightly to the right, rather than swinging sharply to the left...But for a brief period the existing system had been brought to a halt by the combined action of students and workers.

Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties*.

May'68: A Well Cited Political Watershed.

The influence of Paris May'68 on the development of British political theatre has been widely acknowledged by a range of dramatists, theorists, and practitioners. For instance Howard Brenton has gone on record to state how, for him, 'May 1968 was crucial'. 'It was', he writes, 'a great watershed' directly affecting both his personal life and his work. For proof we need look no further than his 1973 play *Magnificence* which, he says, developed directly out of the Paris rebellion and plainly reflects many of its themes, illustrating, at the same time, Brenton's engagement with the very Situationist texts which underpinned the real events.¹ More broadly David Edgar has suggested that '1968 can be taken as the starting date for the development of political theatre in Britain'. He claims 'The general upsurge of revolutionary and radical consciousness among students and intellectuals affected young theatre workers just like anyone else'- 1968 'marked out the beginnings of an effective, self aware "alternative theatre" in this country'.² In *The Politics of Performance* (1992), Baz Kershaw notes that the copycat occupations we see at Hornsey, LSE, and Guildford were not isolated incidents but mirrored the widespread assimilation of continental ideas by British political playwrights. As an illustration of this the book cites 7:84's John McGrath who, having travelled to Paris in 1968 as Britain's unofficial 'cultural attaché', notes that post-'68 dramatic output was undeniably affected by the événements. In particular he talks of the 'incredible' and 'fresh' 'new ideas' about 'ordinary life' and everyday culture this 'exciting...para revolutionary situation threw up'.³ In another seminal study of the milieu,

¹ See David Edgar, 'Ten Years Of Political Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 8, (1978), p. 25 - 33. John Bull, *New British Political Dramatists*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 14.

² 'Ten Years of Political Theatre', p 25.

³ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 123, 148-149.

Disrupting the Spectacle (1975), Peter Ansorge writes that 'increasingly, 1968 can be marked out as a watershed in our recent theatrical, if not political history'.⁴ In *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre Since 1968* Catherine Itzin simply puts it that '1968 was a historic year which politicised a lot of people'.⁵ Like Edgar, Itzin makes the correlation between the radicalisation of the '68 students and an attendant counter-culture with the rise of a socialist 'alternative' theatre. Before the watershed of 1968, she observes, 'there were merely a handful of playwrights writing for the fringe'; ten years later the numbers had risen to over 250. Moreover, influenced by the same radical cultural theories McGrath adopted as his own, these newly politicised post-'68 theatre workers sought to develop 'new audiences, a new aesthetic, a new kind and concept of theatre'.⁶ In *Dreams and Deconstructions* (1980), edited by Sandy Craig, the importance of the moment of 1968 is reiterated by paraphrasing, à la Itzin, Ansorge: '1968 was in many respects lift-off year for alternative' theatre.⁷ John Bull in his *New British Political Dramatists* (1984) began the book with the chapter '1968 and all That' and went on to write about how in the late 60s (particularly post-'68 judging by the section heading)

a number of quite startling changes occurred in British theatre, changes which for the first time challenged the very basis of theatrical organisation, and heralded the beginning of the most consistently exciting decade of drama of the entire century.⁸

At the same time post-'68 political plays register the cultural aftershock of the *événements* with their multiple references, whether explicit or implicit, to various May'68 themes.⁴ In Trevor Griffiths' *The Party* (1973) the demonstrations and streets of Paris were made unequivocally present by transporting the political imagery and icons of the day, large revolutionary banners of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Leon Trotsky, onto the stage of the National Theatre. At other moments the auditorium was transformed into 'the nights of the barricades' when the audience was thrown into darkness and Situationist slogans were projected upon backdrops suggesting the spectator

⁴ Peter Ansorge, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain*, (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975) p. 1.

⁵ Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968*, (London: Methuen, 1980), p1.

⁶ Itzin, see iv-xv, preface.

⁷ Sandy Craig, (ed), *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative theatre in Britain*, (Ambergate: Amber Lane Press, 1980), pp. 17-18.

⁸ Bull, p 1.

Violez Votre Alma Mater, whilst contemporary cinematic reportage of 'Paris students marching, protesting' played loudly upon large cinema screens. Equally, although preferring to refer to the Turin Occupations of the 1920s, rather than the Paris Occupation Movement, his earlier play *Occupations* (1970) was a direct response to 'the failure of the '68 revolution in France'.⁹ In David Hare's *Teeth n Smiles* (1975), and *City Sugar* (1975), written by Stephen Poliakoff, May'68 operated as the signifier of an idealised, though often betrayed, or lapsed, utopian period in western culture. In *Magnificence* we see the ubiquitous Situationist, Jed, used to indicate the politics of the 'enragé' who set out to smash the façade of the 'society of the spectacle' (in this case the 'spectacle of politics'), by strapping a wrap of gelignite to a Conservative politician's face. The MP observes that this new-style fashionable revolutionary is "Into" Situationist theory...the politics of gesture...a violent intervention. A disruption. A spectacle against the spectacle. A firework in the face of the ruling class'. (*Magnificence* Scene 8) In *Weapons of Happiness* (1976) Brenton evoked radical Situationist politics again when a younger generation of politicised workers were shown refusing the authority of accepted trade union representation, engineering a wildcat strike, and occupying their factory, so echoing the activities of the real Situationist driven Occupations Movement active throughout the *événements*. In a very different kind of play, *AC/DC* (1970), Heathcote Williams suggested that modern subjects are constructed out of adopted images and roles borrowed from TV, film, and popular music, the playwright aligning himself with Situationist thinking about the hopelessness of authentic existence within an all pervasive Society of the Spectacle.

The above, of course, is saying nothing new. Ansorge plainly observes, too, that '*AC/DC* takes place in a world completely dominated by the spectacle' and that the play is indicative of the widespread disillusionment with this spectacular society experienced by other political playwrights.¹⁰ Bull is thinking in the same vein when he tells us that Brenton's generation were 'kicked awake' by Situationist theory to realise 'the grotesque spectacle that is public life'.¹¹ *Dreams and Deconstructions* points out the unremarkable fact that the influence of the SI (*Situationniste Internationale*) was widespread on writers such as Snoo Wilson, Brenton and McGrath.¹²

⁹ Trevor Griffiths, *Trevor Griffiths: Plays 1* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.5.

¹⁰ Ansorge, pp. 78 & 7.

¹¹ Bull, p. 14.

¹² Craig, p. 19.

However, what will be original to this analysis is the initiation of a critical process which identifies the theoretical spaces wherein these hitherto canonised texts fall short of the mark. For, although every one of these studies is clearly aware of the lineage between May'68 and the subsequent development of post-'68 British political theatre, their analysis of this phenomenon goes little further than the examples I have already isolated. In fact their indices say it all. For example, although Itzin's book promises to be a 'chronicle of the period', there is no express reference to the Society of the Spectacle, SI, Occupations Movement, Wilhelm Reich, Guy Debord, or Raoul Vaneigem. This is surprising for all are essential to the formation of any thoroughgoing understanding of *how* May'68's aesthetic theories, philosophical themes and political attitudes really *do* underpin the development of the political theatre the text accepts as given. Although the 'society of the spectacle' has three citations in Kershaw's *Politics of Performance*, the book omits any real discussion of the kind of sway SI theory had upon political theatre. Reich is missing, along with Vaneigem, Debord, and the Occupation Movement, though Paris is referred to twice. In all but name The Situationists are left out in Craig and Anson's work. Reich is in *Disrupting the Spectacle*, but not *Dreams and Deconstructions*. Any comment upon the influence of Debord and Vaneigem or the Occupation Movement is notably absent in both. Bull references the Situationist International on seven occasions, but misses out Reich, Vaneigem, Debord, Society of the Spectacle, and The Occupation Movement.

This is not to criticise these texts for lack of intellectual insight or academic value. Anson's study is only eighty pages long, yet in its brevity captures the period well. The other texts, more comprehensive to be sure, are invaluable accounts of the revolutionary intentions of the political playwrights and dramas they produced in this period. However, that said, given that all except Kershaw make the sweeping claim that May'68 was the defining influence upon political theatre over the next decade, they all stop short of developing a more comprehensive analysis. Realising this space in the existent field of study, this thesis seeks to build upon their invaluable work, whilst introducing new knowledge into the public domain.

The Revolution of Everyday Life: Neither Washington nor Moscow

To put this process into gear, therefore, we must return to the very missing theorists, political movements, aesthetic and cultural ideas that informed this revolutionary epoch. In particular, we must return to two key texts which prejudiced the course of the May'68 *événements* and, directly or indirectly, the development of British political theatre 1968–1978. The most infamous and widely read of these is Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) which, as the title suggests, deals with his concept of 'society of the spectacle', the nature of which I have just briefly described but will analyse further below. However, less widely read, though arguably more influential (and identifiable) in the theories which moulded the events, is Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (*The Facts of Life for Younger Readers*) published in English as *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967).

The book begins with a critique of what Vaneigem negatively identifies as the 'world of survival'. Originally, the project of modernity - a dream pursued by both Capitalism and Soviet Communism - was to build a rational society free from want and scarcity, a utopia, the world of survival. Having satisfied these human needs, through greater productivity and labour saving machinery, establishing the world of survival, the next function of technological and scientific innovation was to bring about a 'new era of play'. Play and temporal freedom could now replace work as the sole occupation of the free-from-material-want human subject. Instead, Vaneigem observes, this very same technology has been colonised, not for the emancipation of the masses, but re-harnessed for the production and consumption of commodities within an all-pervasive consumer society, merely adding profit to the coffers of capitalism. Play has thus been postponed by consumption. Consequently the world of survival is anti-utopian. Everyday life is stuck with mundane and repetitive soulless work merely maintained for the consumption of commodities requiring more work for their acquisition, not less.

Moreover, for Vaneigem, what made this situation even more depressing, despite the fact that his own work is unquestionably influenced by Marxist theory, albeit a non-dogmatic Marxism, is that this preoccupation with consumption and production, and consequent duplicity towards potential human freedom, was as true of left-wing parties and societies as their

counterparts on the right. Post-war politics had simply become another form of market commodification. Each political product was interchangeable with the next. To buy into communism or capitalism was to embrace an artificially differentiated and meaningless political role.

At first glance the main thing would seem to be the choice of the 'consumable image'. The housewife-who-uses-Fairy-Snow is different – and the difference is measured in profits – from the housewife-who-uses-Tide. The Labour voter differs from the Conservative voter, and the Communist from the Christian in much the same way. But such differences are hard to discern...It matters little whether people are good or bad, honest or criminal, left-wing or right-wing: the *form* is irrelevant, just so long as they lose themselves in it.¹³

To reverse this state of affairs Vaneigem, and those who belonged to the *Situationniste Internationale*, called for the creation of a new style of politics, one which embraced neither right nor left, Washington nor Moscow, communist nor capitalist. To kick-start this process Vaneigem began by denouncing trade-unions and their bureaucratic leaders as traitors to the working class, used by capitalist and socialist governments alike, merely another instrument for controlling the workers. In place of trade-unions the SI advocated workers' councils or syndicates. Essentially anarchistic, they would no longer be controlled by capitalists or the state, but managed by the workers. To begin to progress towards greater worker autonomy, therefore, rather than adhere to the mores of trade union reformism, which believed in negotiation and practiced compromise, the Situationists agitated for wild-cat strikes (strikes taken without trade-union authority). Even more radical was the SI's argument that, if one was to bring about a utopian post-survival society, workers must, by necessity, seize the very means of control and production by occupying the factories. In so doing the workers could begin to actively participate in restructuring work around human needs rather than industrial outcomes. Above all, revolutionary workers' councils appealed to the Situationists because, by the very nature of their democratic structure, every worker was free to participate in all sectors of workaday life. Councils were also important because they announced the end of 'specialisations' built within the capitalist division of labour. Having taken

¹³ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), p. 136.

control of the means of production the worker was now a potential designer, manager, producer, boss, and trade-unionist all rolled into one, intelligent enough to contribute to decision-making, autonomous enough to control production, not for economic profit, but for the end of personal and cultural poverty.

If this new situation could be brought about, it would serve as a potent example of what Vaneigem calls a 'reversal of perspective'.¹⁴ Being human in a modern setting would no longer be experienced as moments of 'sacrifice', 'isolation', 'humiliation', components symptomatic of an overarching 'survival sickness' found in societies organised solely around work and consumption. Instead, life would be restructured around 'the energy of the will to live', of 'desire unleashed' and 'the passion of love', the promised utopian era of play.¹⁵

To bring about this end, the revolution that should overthrow this 'sick' world of survival ought to be, given their simultaneous anti-work and anti-communist stance, a new and fresh form of revolution, one which embodied the very creativity, spontaneity, and participation the Situationists saw crushed in all forms of industrial capitalism, but reinstated in play. This is not a problem for Vaneigem since playful activity is a manifestation of revolutionary action anyway, epitomising 'the spontaneous creativity and festive atmosphere given free rein in revolutionary moments...when people are overtaken by *joie de vivre*'. Moreover, revolutionary play and playful revolution are key factors in understanding Situationist politics because within play the revolutionary subject becomes 'lost to leadership and stage management of any kind'.¹⁶ For, in contrast to work, play is the very antithesis of any adherence to social authority or creative control, it is *anti-authoritarian* by its very nature. It follows no other course except the demands of *jouissance* and imagination. Therefore, any real revolution of everyday life must also reflect this ideal, 'one must have as much fun as possible' changing this society.¹⁷ Furthermore, following the logic of play, Situationist politics was also scrupulous in its anti-authoritarianism. This translated into a scathing contempt for orthodox political figureheads, cult revolutionary leaderships or intellectual vanguards of any description.

In addition, again pursuing a Situationist logic to the very letter, revolution had to begin from the bottom up, for, given the SI's opposition to any

¹⁴ Vaneigem, p. 149.

¹⁵ Vaneigem, p. 200.

¹⁶ Vaneigem, p. 149.

¹⁷ Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

form of specialisation or social and cultural divisions, to tag along blindly behind a political elite was tantamount to endorsing the existence of the revolutionary specialist. One had to become one's own leader. In the same way, if revolution was to be anti-specialist, and bottom up, this new rebellion must commence with a critique, even destruction, of *all* aspects of existent, orthodox, everyday life, including the most routine of practices. For example, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* strives to develop an all encompassing 'radical theory' which, no longer taking the economic sphere as the lone field of political struggle (this would be futile given governments of both East and West condone identical economic policies), seeks to attack these very societies through the forms of work, fashion, consumerism, community, architecture, sexuality, culture, philosophy, and education they actually create, since for the Situationist, everything is interconnected, inseparable.

Following Reich, the SI argued that a political revolution was unthinkable without a sexual one because, they said, sexual repression and poverty is inextricable from economic and experiential poverty. Lack of control over one's own biological body, the physical means of reproduction, is politically related to lack of control over one's material means of production, everyday life and material physical space. To demand to live more creatively, in an aesthetic or industrial sense, is also to demand a more innovative imaginative multi-dimensional politics. To search for participatory modes of industrial organisation is to campaign for widespread participation in political and social activism. A refusal of the old paternal totalitarian political systems and value structures becomes a refusal of all oppressive familial and institutional structures. To seize the industrial and economic means of production is the same as gaining control of the intellectual and cultural means of production, seizing the factory is equivalent to taking over the university. To regain control of the bourgeois street, transforming it into a new site of political communication, through painted graffiti and slogans, say, is also to encourage the seizure of other forms of bourgeois space, property, and media, for example, the theatre, for revolutionary ends.

The Strasbourg Pamphlet: The Revolution Detonated.

Many of these ideas were aired, and given practical form, in the 1966 SI pamphlet 'On Student Poverty' which, according to Daniel Cohn-Bendit,

'detonated' the May events.¹⁸ In fact, translated into ten languages, known as 'the Strasbourg Pamphlet', the tract put forward many of the arguments later outlined in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Consequently, rather than simply attacking socialist or bourgeois capitalism, it announced the SI's 'systematic assault on the unbearable order of things'. Beginning with the university,¹⁹ the tract suggested that, far from existing in a separate political or economic elite bubble away from other workers and work environments, the student, too, is an appendage of the capitalist state; the university plainly an intellectual 'sausage machine' designed to manufacture 'uneducated students'. 'Rendered incapable of thinking' students are so prepared for their role as the lower cadres of modern capitalism and inevitable membership of the privileged and cultured ruling class.²⁰ In other sections of the article students were attacked for their passive acceptance of sexual, as well economic, poverty. The text goaded:

In a period when more and more young people are increasingly breaking free from moral prejudices and family authority ...the student clings to his irresponsible and docile "protracted infancy" [...] He is so "unconventional" that thirty years after Reich that excellent educator of youth, he continues to follow the most traditional forms of amorous erotic behaviour, reproducing the general relations of class society in his inter-sexual relations.²¹

The timing of this provocative comment deserves admiration, for up until this point, and despite a tentative sexual revolution elsewhere, (particularly, it was thought, amongst workers), the French bourgeois student still found him/herself subject to draconian laws of sexual segregation and, therefore, sexual repression. In this manner the student's *whole way of life* was made to fit in with the Situationist correlation between absence of control over their sexual body and a parallel lack of control over their economic, cultural, intellectual, and material means of production.

¹⁸ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism The Left Wing Alternative*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969). Bendit writes: 'the student pamphlet brought student discontent out into the open: it acted as a kind of detonator...as a result an increasing number of students became aware of the journal *Internationale Situationniste*, and the radical ideas it expressed. pp. 27-28.

¹⁹ Rene Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* (New York: Autonomedia/ Rebel Press, 1992), see 'Origin of the Agitation in France', pp. 16-20.

²⁰ Cohn-Bendit, p.27. See also Keith Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 27.

²¹ Ken Knabb, (ed), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), pp. 320 & 323.

The May'68 événements

As a piece of political and cultural propaganda, designed to shock the hitherto passive student community into action, waking it to the 'real conditions' of its own everyday life, the pamphlet worked. In French universities small groups of radicalised *enragés*, the most militant of the May'68 students, attempted to liberate de-sexualised spaces by occupying the female sleeping quarters in the rather comic 'battle of the dormitories'. In other politicised gestures lectures were disrupted when angry students pelted professors with tomatoes, protesting at the part the pamphlet suggested the university psychology department played in maintaining the capitalist structure, advising French industry on the psychological control of workers. Meanwhile, at Nantes, radical students illustrated the SI's call to form independent workers' councils by occupying the offices of the reformist UNEF (French Student Union).

The symbolic threat this seizure of the means of intellectual production posed to the established order was plainly illustrated when the Dean called in police units to grab the offices back. Violent struggles ensued with students resisting eviction, despite the fierce force used by state police officers with batons and tear gas. However, rather than quelling student unrest, providing a harsh example to other would-be radicals, most commentators argue that it was this very police violence which turned 'tiny minorities...into substantial minorities' and then majority support.²² Coincidentally, at the same time, the Vietnam War threw up an unexpected, though far more violent, corresponding conflict to the campus battles. In January the minority Vietnamese Communists launched their 'Tet Offensive', achieving spectacular gains against the American backed South Vietnamese government, reclaiming territory from US troops. Subsequent leftist political thinking moved swiftly to equate the Tet Offensive, and the Vietnam War *per se*, with their own minority struggles. The war became emblematic of all humanitarian struggles being fought between the 'just' and the 'unjust'. Moreover, the Tet action was particularly significant for it seemed at long last to have broken the mould of socialist defeats against capitalist imperialism.²³ In an attempt to weld the two conflicts together further, in an act of solidarity, students and anti-war protestors attacked the US Embassy and American Express building with small incendiary devices and

²² Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.604.

²³ Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), pp. 164.

threw stones to break windows. When police picked up and arrested demonstrators in the streets and once more invaded the Nantes campus, this led to the formation of The Movement of March 22nd, or, 'Occupation Movement'. Led by the aforementioned German student, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, sticking closely to Situationist theory, the March 22nd group sought to unify the anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and student cause under one radical banner by organising a 'teach-in' on the 'evils of imperialism'. Although planned for 29th March, university bureaucrats quickly responded and the campus was closed, denying student access. The building was shut again on May 3rd after violent clashes between fascists and students. Eight students from the March 22nd Movement were ordered to appear before a disciplinary committee at the Sorbonne on May 6th. In a counter move, and protest at the closing of Nantes, another demonstration was held at the Sorbonne, the 'sacred space' of French intellectual life and culture. As if to underline this act of cultural de-sanctification, police massed outside the Sorbonne ready to take action against the radical students by re-claiming the hallowed cultural centre of Paris, the Sorbonne.²⁴ From here on in events spiralled out of control. Police entered the Sorbonne and, despite their having agreed to leave peacefully, aggressively arrested the *enragés*. This apparently duplicitous act aroused the ire of numerous hitherto peace-loving students, along with other leftist sympathisers, to more radical forms of action. Taking matters into their own hands, and meeting violence with violence, they tore up paving stones and joined in the now commonplace attacks upon the police. This was duly met with more tear gas and truncheons. During these clashes eighty policemen and several hundred students and civilians were injured, with 590 arrested.²⁵

These violent events in the Latin Quarter brought wide-scale protests and violent demonstrations to the whole of France. Perhaps in a state of panic, police violence reached 'an exponential curve of brutality' as they attempted to defeat 'dangerous revolutionaries'²⁶ by brute force, whilst, at the same time, meting out prison sentences to the now radicalised students. Reacting to this, further demonstrations were called, which, in turn, produced more police violence, which, in turn, produced more street demonstrations. As if to corroborate the Situationist thesis that bureaucratic socialism was in league with state or bourgeois capitalism, the CGT (French Communist Party) joined in

²⁴ Marwick, p. 605.

²⁵ Marwick, p. 606.

²⁶ Marwick, p. 606.

the vocal attacks against the rioting students by, rather ironically, condemning them as 'false revolutionaries', this being Vaneigem's adopted description of the pre-pamphlet student revolutionary.²⁷

With the Sorbonne still closed, we arrive at the 'night of the barricades'. As Marwick puts it:

By Friday 10 May moderate students had become sufficiently radicalised, the wider public scandalised, and the militants and ideological extremists sufficiently organised for it to be possible for the students to go on a systematic offensive.²⁸

However, paradoxically, this offensive was set up not to attack but defend cultural space and intellectual fields. For example it was suggested that demonstrators should, where possible, abstain from violence, peacefully 'occupy' the Latin Quarter, and form discussion groups whilst, at the same time, build barricades to mark of this reclaimed territory.²⁹ Perhaps by chance, perhaps not, these protective barricades were aptly built from consumables such as motorcars and vans, with other materials commandeered from private building sites. Even more poignant, the students were now joined by young workers, lending the event the spectacle of a certain tentative class solidarity. This was reinforced as the students became, for once, engaged in manual labour, constructing material things, whilst the workers actively helped defend student intellectual spaces. All in all a 'warlike' revolutionary atmosphere pervaded the Parisian streets. We see Molotov cocktails lined up alongside the ubiquitous arsenal of paving-stones, and communication between the burning barricades of the 'occupied quarters' maintained by radios or despatch riders. Police fired grenade guns containing gas, causing blindness, vomiting, and spasms. The excessive police power brought thousands of ordinary citizens out of their homes to demonstrate. In a symbolic act of defiance the *Internationale* was widely sung as whole neighbourhoods, communities who helped build the barricades in the first place, 'passed the night in the street'.³⁰ Revolutionary solidarity escalated when hitherto recalcitrant trade-union leaders called for a twenty-four hour general strike to be held on 13th May.

²⁷ Marwick, p. 606-7. (CGT support only came after an marked increase in police brutality)

²⁸ Marwick, p. 607.

²⁹ Marwick, p. 607.

³⁰ Marwick, p. 609.

The call for a general strike was a crucial escalation because it promised to be the first sign of a certain student/worker rapprochement; the ending of social and cultural separations between previously segmented intellectual and manual workers. Indeed, as the strike spread, mass street demos received widespread support with 40% of all workers participating alongside schoolchildren, white-collar staff, academics and the general public. Paris demonstrations, no longer political spectacles staged by a minority of *enragés*, attracted attendances of up to one million people, as did parallel events throughout France.

Within a week seven million workers, particularly the young, were occupying their factories, with little or no regard for the authority of their trade union leaders, in a demand for better wages and conditions. Following hard on the heels of these industrial occupations many other hitherto exclusive social spaces were, as the Situationists demanded, also being liberated. The Sorbonne was declared open in perpetuity as a summer university for workers and students alike. One of the most infamous and celebrated acts of the *événements* was the occupation of the Odeon Theatre in Paris. Following the hard logic of workers' councils, those who normally passively consume spectacles within the theatre seized their opportunity to become performers, participants in real events - in taking the stage they were now free to have their say, transforming the French theatre, like the university, and, to a lesser extent, the factory, into a new space for political debate.³¹ The occupation of the Odeon was particularly significant for here the radicals were making a direct correlation between the freeing up of cultural spaces with personal liberation. One had to liberate space to be free to talk. This is not surprising for, as Keith Reader points out in *The May 1968 Events in France* (1993), during May'68, the Occupation Movement was simultaneously 'a battle for political power and individual autonomy translated...into a battle for the possession of (physical and symbolic) space'.³² In other words, to be personally free of bourgeois ideology and political power one had to firstly be prepared to liberate these bourgeois spaces. In the case of the Odeon, for example, because the theatre is a means of production, a sort of intellectual factory for producing and maintaining bourgeois meanings, culture, and social relations, only when liberated could it be transformed into a counter-space, and put to work against

³¹ To this communicative end the new owners, (suggesting, at the same time, that French life had become another spectacle) invited 'workers, students and artists' to meet together at 'the ex-theatre of France'. Marwick, pp. 621-611.

³² Reader, p. 12.

what it once stood for. This is why the Occupations Movement, whether at the university, theatre or wherever, purposefully set out to be *un-orthodox*, anti-bourgeois, in the *form* of its discussions and debate. In contrast to the elitism of pre-occupation, anyone, whether worker, student, or artist, was free to contribute tracts, posters, political styles, or just opinions. Factory occupations, though less eclectic and political, were equally unorthodox with festivity, games, and dancing usurping work.³³

In much the same way the street and city landscapes were also being put to an alternative and more colourful use. Taking on the appearance of one enormous politico-philosophical tract, the political theses of Vaneigem, Debord and the SI were crudely painted upon city walls. Slogans proclaimed "Take Your Desires for Reality", "Trade Unions are Brothels", "Boredom is Counter Revolutionary", "Never Work", "Under the Paving Stones the Beach", "Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible", "It is Prohibited to Prohibit". Indeed, according to the *enragé* Réne Viénet, this 'critical vandalism' should be marked out as one of the most effective and original forms of agitation to arise from the Occupation Movement'.³⁴ Almost identical to the way that spectators and workers were breaking into theatres and factories, political and philosophical debate was breaking out of academic fields of discussion and elitist commodities (intellectual texts), re-occupying everyday space. As a consequence public space and public consciousness (the most important and urgent of spaces to be re-occupied) became suffused with radical theories. Moreover, expressed in a proletarian form or expression of the underclass - graffiti (the writing of toilet walls) - these gestures bucked the trend whereby 'the works of philosophers, sociologists and professional politicians...are written in a style which is not intended for the workers.'³⁵ As quickly as physical barriers were going up, then, intellectual barriers were being brought down. Interpersonal barriers, too, were collapsing. With France brought to a near standstill, roads and cars abandoned, the streets could be reclaimed for community and social interaction. In contrast to the alienation of work, which fuels the very society of the spectacle the protestors were against (conspicuous consumption merely reinforces the separation of subjects in a hierarchical ownership of commodities), 'the lonely crowd was replaced by fraternal

³³ Reader, p. 13.

³⁴ Viénet, p. 21- 22. For a comprehensive record of May'68 slogans and graffiti see Viénet's comprehensively illustrated text.

³⁵ Bendit, p. 13.

community'³⁶ as people once more sat and walked together in the streets, using free time to discuss politics, philosophy or pursue simple recreation.

The political theory which fuelled this revolutionary fervour was, as Marwick rightly claims, even amongst those who previously had considered themselves anti-marxist, a 'generalised marxism'. It was now being 'taken as read by all sections of society'³⁷ and, indeed, the wider world, that, during May '68, as Marx had long predicted, the bourgeois state, and society, was at last in terminal crisis. In less than a month France had virtually come to a standstill precipitated by large-scale student protests, occupations, and a general strike which saw nine million workers abandon their everyday adherence to capitalist modes of production and state authority. Overall 15,000,000 working days were lost so, rather unwittingly, perhaps, giving concrete form to the Situationist scorn for work.³⁸ At the same time the eight deaths and two thousand injured emphasise the high stakes against which the conflict was played out. In reality, at certain junctures it appeared that the entire regime was about to collapse. In sum, May '68 was an 'extraordinary month' in which, for a few weeks, the extended western world, particularly Britain, witnessed 'the extraordinary site of power wobbling like a nervous jelly'.³⁹

By the end of the summer, however, the revolution had all but buckled. Fresh elections were held and, with the promise of reformist wage increases, life and work in the factories returned to normality. To cap it all the French public reinstated the right-wing President De Gaulle with an increased majority and a mandate to carry on as before.

Enragés and Contestation.

May'68 had, though, been beamed into thousands of British homes.⁴⁰ Mick Farren, for instance, describes how, for the duration of the *événements*, would-be radicals gravitated to the very TV sets which, in other moments, they dismissed as technological tools of the spectacle.⁴¹ Now, though, gripped by pictures of the student rebels burning cars, hurling cobblestones, and fighting off police tear gas rounds, the TV facilitated a showing of the very violence that

³⁶ Reader, p. 28.

³⁷ Marwick, p. 614.

³⁸ Reader, p. 1.

³⁹ Rowbotham, p. 179.

⁴⁰ The events, in fact, were attended by many British counter- culture radicals.

⁴¹ Mick Farren, *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 185.

radically politicised post-'68 playwrights.⁴² More to the point, what these TV pictures and reports actually did, whether this revolution ultimately failed or not, was to demonstrate that, in contrast to the orthodox reformism of traditional trade-union/student politicking, characterised by protracted theoretical debates and resolutions, socialist theory is of no revolutionary consequence if it does not challenge or change the existing order of things. That is, theory must be transposed into physical gestures and practice, such that radicals occupy spaces, take over the means of communication, physically bring radical philosophy - or violence - to the streets.⁴³

This televised revolution was significant in other ways. For instance it introduced the British to a different type of political activist. For the catalyst to campus revolt, and, more importantly, the resultant revolutionary situation, was not a left-wing intellectual, or Party bureaucrat, but a figure outside this tradition, the *enragé*. Broadly speaking adolescent, *enragés* are central to any understanding of the *événements*, and, of course, political theatre, for it was they, and they only, who embodied the 'power of fear and anxiety, the hurricane of hatred, the wild impetus of the urge for destruction,' Vaneigem identified within the subject-sick-of-survival-sickness.⁴⁴ Indeed, the SI pushed this 'new delinquency' and 'youth revolt' as a heroic and fresh 'force of negation' for all they were worth. This was because, unlike his predecessors, the delinquent, like all good Situationists, 'no longer "respects" moral and family order...gives itself over to "debauchery" despises work and no longer obeys the Party police'.⁴⁵ Keith Reader identifies this resurgent form of adolescent politics as *contestation*, its agents *contestataires*. In contrast to previous 'constructive' revolutionaries, the *contestataire* wants to "smash the place up". Ambition is always negative.

⁴² During 1968 many other extreme acts of violence shocked and politicised people to protest and demonstrate. For example, besides the war in Vietnam, there was the attempted murder of a German student activist, Rudi Dutschke, the assassination of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, the crushing of the Prague uprising leading to the self immolation of a Czech student, looting and rioting in US and Italian cities, armed troops guarding the Whitehouse. Guns appear on a US campus and shots fired as radicals attempted to storm the Chicago Democratic Convention. For a fuller account of the student violence that erupted during May'68, and attitudes to its 'inevitability', even revolutionary 'desirability', see Marwick, pp. 599 - 602.

⁴³ An example of this political quietism can be found during the dormitory affair. Rather than take direct action, an 'academic debate' had been slowly taking place amongst the UNEF on the possible reform of 'anti-sexual statutes'. Viénet, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Vaneigem, p. 200.

⁴⁵ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 329.

The world of the *contestataire* is characterised...by hostility to any form of authority, the wish for absolute equality, and the constant striving to create – all revealing a refusal of fatherhood...doing away with the order of the father – fatherhood, descendent, the family and its offshoots.⁴⁶

Such an oedipal revolt was the aim of the SI's confrontational correlation between the oedipalised student's protracted infantilism and the university as his 'new family', lecturers merely surrogate figures of authority. 'He is their well behaved and grateful child. Following the logic of the *submissive child*, he shares all the values and mystifications of the system in himself'.⁴⁷ By contrast the anti-oedipal student *contestataire* was encouraged to be anti all forms of 'the system', anti-theory, anti-psychiatry, anti-university, anti-communist, anti-capitalist, anti-leadership, anti-art, anti-culture, and, most importantly, as street graffiti demonstrated, violently anti-intellectual - "Althusser is useless".⁴⁸

Radical Gestures

This thoroughgoing anti-intellectualism is particularly interesting because, although May'68 was driven by radical theory, which informed practice, in reality the *événements* embodied a physical manifestation of what Sadie Plant calls material 'radical gestures'.⁴⁹ The occupation of a university building or factory was a radical gesture because to occupy such an institution is to offer a root and branch active illustration of the need to reclaim control of the cultural, intellectual and economic means of production, rather than passively write about revolutionary workers' councils. When students in France, Italy, Britain, and America took control of college spaces they did so, for sure, to gain a wider hearing for their demand to get more control over syllabuses, exams, and teaching styles, arguing for more participatory seminars over dictatorial lecture formats. But the fact that they valued participation and control was only really manifested in the gesture itself, what they *did*, not what they *said*. In the same way, if the university is a microcosm of society at large, as the SI claimed, and revolutionary socialism demands a classless society, then the restructuring of that society must also take place in the university. As a socio-

⁴⁶ Reader, p. 32. Reader is citing, here, from a psychoanalytic study *L'Univers contestationnaire/The World of Contestation* which sees the May revolt as linked to the oedipal conflict i.e. it is an anti-oedipal revolt (see chapter 1: Anti-Oedipus).

⁴⁷ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 321.

⁴⁸ Reader, p. 63.

⁴⁹ Plant, p. 11.

hierarchical structure, it, too, must make the radical gesture of abolishing all taxonomic specialist structures with students becoming teachers, contributing to the creation of knowledge as equals, in the same way that workers must grow to be collaborative bosses participating in decision making and sharing responsibility for the product produced. In a connected way, if Situationism advocated, in theory, a new kind of society, anti-elitist, geared to everyday human desires, instead of forms of learning they dismissed as abstract dead knowledge, then revolutionaries must make this radical content physical by constructing a new style of university, open and democratic with a syllabus relevant to everyday life.

Situationism and Britain

In Britain, many of these gestures struck a resonant chord and were duly adopted by the counter-cultural left. The Anti-psychiatrists, for instance, who concurred with much Situationist theory, attempted to kick-start a utopian society, 'turning attitudes into form',⁵⁰ by creating an alternative anti-university. Here, in contrast to elitist educational spaces, they provided a democratic platform, 'for people who didn't have one', to lecture and talk on a variety of everyday topics.⁵¹ This thoroughgoing egalitarianism was stretched so far as to actively encourage students to teach teachers. Furthermore, with admission cheap, students could be drawn from a wide spectrum of society. The anti-university also taught only that which it considered relevant to everyday life, topics ordinary people wished to be taught, useful to them, rather those deemed important to the demands of consumer capitalism. Classes were organised around 'how to roll a joint', or other such topics. However, the anti-university's ultimate role, like that of the *contestataire*, was to destroy or smash the traditional hierarchies of university life - 'student', 'teacher', and 'course' - altogether.⁵² For this reason anti-university lessons were informal, playful affairs which placed emphasis on students having fun rather than acquiring knowledge.

This last example is particularly interesting in that it charts the conversion of the British scene to the fundamental realisation that one must shift the emphasis from the sacred importance of *what* is taught, content,

⁵⁰ Rowbotham, p. 187.

⁵¹ Jonathan Green (ed), *Days in the Life: Voices from the English underground 1961-1971* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 238.

⁵² Rowbotham, p. 181.

whether it be Marxist politics or radical theory, to a stress upon *how* it is taught, its *form*. A British radical influenced by Situationist theory, Mick Farren, seems to back up this emergent phenomenon, by recalling that one of the most potent lessons his generation learnt during this period was that revolutionary style and form can be more threatening than merely socialist political content.⁵³ Although Farren is predominantly alluding to the power of radical fashion, the same held true for political styles. Like the hippies and other counter-cultural activists who set out to smash the old one-dimensional dour dress code of the bourgeois and leftist intelligentsia with their colourful innovative forms of dress, May'68, in its political form, was designed to 'deliberately push the collective buttons of society at large' with its own political style.⁵⁴

This is not surprising. As Reader points out, one of the most original aspects of May'68 was that student radicals 'challenged established political iconography and discourse' by 'producing iconographies of their own'.⁵⁵ In stark contrast to dry political speeches given by white middle-aged men in grey suits at meetings in dull halls, the 'pointless quarrels, vain discussions, forums, debates and Weeks for Marxist thought' Vaneigem expresses disapproval of,⁵⁶ on British political demonstrations we begin to see the vibrant red and yellow flags of the NLF (North Vietnamese Communists) mixed in with gold hammer and sickles embroidered on large soviet-style revolutionary-red banners. The red and black flags of the anarchists were juxtaposed with pop images of Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro, all provocatively paraded down the street. Equally colourful, we see hundreds of posters of Mao, Lenin, Trotsky, and Marx bill-posted upon walls. During this same phase revitalised middle-class revolutionaries would wear their para-military 'sombre struggle gear',⁵⁷ dressing up in Marxist-Leninist proletarian 'blue blouse' dress code,⁵⁸ forming, in theory, a visual threat to the norms of 'straight' parliamentary civil society. To boot, the presence of 'freaks', long-haired hippies, the leather jackets, dirty denim, and skull and cross-bone patches of the Hells Angels, all added extra menace to the visual order of the day. On an audible level demos threatened the collective political silence with chants of "Ho Ho Chi Minh" or "LBJ How Many Children Have You Killed Today", "Rome, London, Paris, Berlin, We Will

⁵³ Farren, p. 68.

⁵⁴ Farren, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Reader, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Vaneigem, p. 150.

⁵⁷ Rowbotham, p. 203.

⁵⁸ Farren, p. 67.

Fight We Will Win".⁵⁹ Whilst records such as Mick Jagger's '*Street Fighting Man*' disturbed neutralised cultural norms with pop songs glorifying street revolutions.⁶⁰

These last few examples deserve more explanation for they illustrate the emergence of the very destruction of the politico-cultural specialisations, or separations, that the SI demanded. As Sheila Rowbotham remarks, prior to 1968, political communication for young socialists had been limited to the ritualised exchange of prose printed upon black and white wordy leaflets⁶¹ indicative of literary culture embraced by the bourgeois class, whereas, on these new-style demonstrations, the barriers between propaganda and everyday activities started to break down.⁶² Political chanting and singing in large unruly groups, laced with the vandalism of the spray can, was more reminiscent of behaviour associated with football supporters, even hooligans. When carrier bags imprinted with NLF flags or anti-war human hamburgers dripping with blood began to materialize around protest marches, these were gestures which previously belonged in art schools or galleries, evoking Andy Warhol's pop art or student degree shows, rather than serious politics.

Simultaneously, these cultural fusions were not just accidentally a-political, neutrally eclectic, but purposeful gestures which symbolised a determined enactment of the same worker/student *rapprochement* we see during May'68. Although to adopt the conduct of a football crowd was not the same as joining the workers, at least the British activists, in some sense, joined forces with the *culture* of the workers. The pop-art carrier bag - even if a symbol of consumption - was also an artefact of mass popular culture, and so the political class or art student attempted a notional act of solidarity. As Farren puts it, if one was to align oneself with the working class politically, post'68 it became imperative that their everyday forms of expression should be valued as valid forms of protest and agitation. Consequently, 'Newspapers, magazines, films, TV and Rock & Roll records' were now to be the weapons of change.⁶³

⁵⁹ Farren, p. 180.

⁶⁰ Keith Reader ties this adoption of old/new forms of political iconography with an overall class solidarity, for, he notes 'the pseudo-insurrectional demonstrations, the forests of red flags, the barricades, the university occupations - all these inspired borrowings from working - class tradition came to form a semantic whole whose aim was to make the student message audible', by updating and amplifying 'a gamut of images and symbols that had been languishing under the drab yoke of Stalinism'. Reader, p. 57.

⁶¹ Rowbotham, p. 170.

⁶² Rowbotham, p. 170.

⁶³ Farren, p. 185.

Synchronicity with SI theory extended into more dangerous territory with the comprehensive adoption of the work of Reich. Following rumours that, during the *événements*, Paris had undergone an erotic metamorphosis, transforming itself into a liberated area of free sex and love by converting radical Situationist theory into action, on this occasion Reich's,⁶⁴ in Britain, too, making love became synonymous with making revolution. For example, Eric Hobsbawm notes in his *Age of Extremes*, May'68 posters proclaimed "When I Think of Revolution I Want to Make Love".⁶⁵ Consequently, 'amicable sexual relations' were commonly encouraged in everyday life⁶⁶ producing an effect Farren calls 'orgonomic generation'.⁶⁷ Like Reich's *The Sexual Revolution* (1951), a book widely read during this period, Richard Neville's *Playpower* (1970) set out to break down British 'oppressive sexual attitudes'⁶⁸ by circulating the SI's 'call to desire' to a wider public. Practicing what he preached Neville performed live sex in front of an invited London cinema audience. Sexual freedom was promoted further within 'experimental centres' where organised communal sex was encouraged, an activity prompted by Jim Haynes' newly formed *Suck* magazine, a publication in-part inspired by his reading of Situationist pamphlets.⁶⁹

'Libido-leftism' may be regarded as radical in that, if all everyday practice is intertwined, and in need of a systematic overhaul, to practice free sex was thought equivalent to practicing a virulent anti-consumerism or anti-capitalism. To possess, as in marriage, another body was considered tantamount to possessing material shackles and property *per se*. Equally, if one could be open minded about sexuality then one could be politically and aesthetically creative and vice versa. Erotic communication came to be thought of as equivalent to physical community, and therefore an antidote to the physical and mental alienation the Situationists identified in consumer society. To aggressively pursue sexual satisfaction was deemed comparable to the satiation of political want. Consequently the sexual revolution was supported by the radical underground press, in particular *Oz* magazine. Into sexual freedom and sexual liberation, it published erotic pictures or photographs with sexual

⁶⁴ Farren, p. 167-168.

⁶⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 –1991* (London: Abacus, 2001), p.332. Situationist texts also talk of the 'joy of revolution' describing it in sexual terms, foreplay, climax etc. see [http:// www. Slip.net/~knabb/PS/jovrev](http://www.Slip.net/~knabb/PS/jovrev)

⁶⁶ Rowbotham, p. 166.

⁶⁷ Farren, p. 247.

⁶⁸ Richard Neville cited in Green, p. 422.

⁶⁹ Jim Haynes cited in Green, p. 420.

content mocking conventional sexual mores.⁷⁰ Like SI journals, underground magazines were crucial to British *contestation*, potent ways of disseminating subversive (Situationist) ideas to the wider public through sales and multiple pass-on rates. Demonstrating the emergent logic of *contestation* the magazines editorial team took the confrontational stance that 'OZ was a way to stick your fingers up at a few things' - the publication sought to 'undermine the corrupt fabric of society'.⁷¹

Alongside other underground publications, *IT* (1967), *Frendz* (1970), *Ink* (1970), and *Nasty Tales* (1971) OZ reflected a Situationist logic in its eclecticism of content and multiple forms of expression. Resembling SI journals, OZ ran features on festivals, revolution, abortion, homosexuality, women's rights, ecology, racism, and political theories, alongside sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, it united painting with dance and music with fashion. In 1968 *Time Out* magazine was published for the first time. By listing demonstrations, talks and political meetings, alongside film programming, the magazine sought to make revolutionary activity as commonplace as going to the cinema.⁷² In accordance with the *enragés'* adherence to proletarian forms of expression, and political fashion (it was now *de rigueur* to be "into" 'downward mobility'), OZ and other magazines, eschewed the monochrome pamphlet or bourgeois broadsheet, and communicated their contents in working-class, even childish (therefore 'playful'), low-tech forms; feigning to be like American DC or Marvel comics, with bright garish glossy covers which featured fantastical super-hero characters.

Other Situationist gestures can be identified in the wider spectrum of counter-cultural undertakings. At the *Albert Hall Poetry Reading* (1965), for example, shadowing Vaneigem's theory that 'there is no such thing as madness'⁷³ (the mad are simply those subjects who conform to bourgeois roles or stereotypes), the 'Anti-Psychiatrists' Ronnie Laing and David Cooper attended along with schizophrenics from their anti-asylum, Kingsley Hall. Like the anti-university, Kingsley Hall was styled differently from previous therapeutic spaces with the community making no distinction between doctors and patients, clinic or living space. By bringing along the 'nutcases', Laing and Cooper potentially sought to reinsert the excluded field of the insane - the asylum - into the 'straight' space of an elite cultural event. Here, though, as was their want,

⁷⁰ Green, p. 383.

⁷¹ Green, p. 382-383.

⁷² Green, p. 265.

⁷³ Vaneigem, p. 137.

the underground embraced the presence of the schizophrenics, for during this period, in a reversal of perspective, the mad were remade saints, 'holy fools'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the event became infamous because – in another reversal of orthodox cultural hierarchies - the mad audience became the show, the source of potential knowledge, whilst the work of art, the 'performance', was reconsidered as secondary. Accordingly, once more, conformist cultural separations were destroyed.

The Occupation Movement in London

Across London other traditional buildings became reoccupied beacons of alternative models of communal living or spatial experiment. The Christian 'All Saints Hall', for example, combined playgroups with music studios and, renouncing commodity ownership, shared its resources. Exemplary in its councilist reasoning, the organisation was managed by the 'community', an independent group which 'comes together, defines its needs and works to establish something'.⁷⁵ The contemporary assault on previously 'fenced off' spaces can be witnessed elsewhere when, protesting against the enclosure of common cityscape which, they argued, should be re-opened as accessible free areas, children and counter-cultural activists came together under the 'We Want Somewhere to Play' movement. The epitome of the anti-separatist logic of occupation, the UFO nightclub in London's Tottenham Court Road refused to simply trade in disco music. Instead the club's management put on pornography, art, films, avant-garde rock groups, and performance happenings. Negating received norms of spatial separation, the venue had no chairs except for huge foam floor cushions. By juxtaposing hitherto isolated cultural spheres in unorthodox social spaces, the counter-culture sought to enact a notional smashing up of received architectural and cultural categories. The UFO club also posed searching cultural questions. Is this a nightclub or a theatre? Does it matter? If it resembles a children's play space, an area for orgies or love-ins, can we still watch performances or theatre in this new less-formal environment? Is an orgy compatible with other cultural events?

A glimpse of the political influence the SI had on the British scene can be seen in the counter-culture's support for the 'neither Washington nor Moscow' politics of the *enragés*. The activist and playwright Heathcote

⁷⁴ Green, p. 209.

⁷⁵ Green, p. 103.

Williams, for one, daubed a wall with graffiti which asserted, "Enoch Powell is Vanessa Redgrave in Drag", that is, the extreme Right and Left were ideologically interchangeable.⁷⁶ At the Grosvenor Square demo the British Situationists *King Mob* carried banners urging protestors to "Storm the Reality Studio, Retake the Universe", and mocked the "Ho Chi Minh" chants of the 'agents of false revolution'⁷⁷ (as the Situationists labelled Trotskyite students) with the nonsensical "Hot Chocolate Drinking Chocolate".⁷⁸

The desire to destroy all forms of previous leftfield praxis, to smash up all that was held culturally and politically dear by the old-left, is illustrated particularly clearly in the British radical's adoption of the deviant outlaw *per se*. Reflecting what Eric Hobsbawm has identified as the avant-garde's *Nostalgie de la boue* - longing for the gutter - the counter-culture feted groups like the London Street Commune, 'a bunch of long-haired Hells Angels', rather than the tweedy corduroy-wearing respectable revolutionaries of 'stuffy student politics'.⁷⁹ Old models of political meetings or academic forums were destroyed by the aptly named Social Deviants who, on a stage knocked up out of old planks and scaffolding, played loud rock music at the 1968 Dialectics of Liberation Conference. Jim Haynes adhered to the logic of the deviant, when, paralleling the occupation of the Paris Odeon, he took over a London theatre space - the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre - and put on the *Destruction in Art Symposium*. During one piece a performer 'coughed up phlegm, pissed into bowls' using 'throat and penis mikes' to amplify the sound throughout the auditorium; after which 'the resulting fluids were placed under microscopic slides and then blown up and projected on a huge screen'.⁸⁰ Although often symbolic, the assault upon cultural spaces, techniques, and normative social values reached its concrete apotheosis when the Situationist flavoured Angry Brigade took anti-consumerism to new limits with their plot to blow up the fashion emporium BiBa, as well as government ministers, for being conspicuous agents of the spectacle.

Much of this 'shock and awe' gesturing conformed to the spatial recuperative logic and disturbance of extant physical fields I outlined in descriptions of the Occupation Movement. However, post-'68 cultural hooliganism aimed also to colonise or destroy *psychological environments*. This

⁷⁶ Green, p.102.

⁷⁷ See 'Our Goals and Methods in the Strasbourg Scandal', in *The Situationist Anthology*, pp. 204-212.

⁷⁸ Farren, p. 182.

⁷⁹ Green, p. 232.

⁸⁰ This piece was named *Son et Lumiere for Bodily Functions and Fluids*, see Green, p. 99.

was to be achieved initially by shocking people out of their normative psychic states into new modes and models of critical thought. Above we saw how graffiti was adopted by the SI and elevated to a higher creative critical level as a valid form of art, whilst without this gesture it remained the dumb expression of the underclass. Likewise, post-'68 we see an intellectual rapprochement towards multiple forms of working-class culture, because, like graffiti, art was now to be valued for its commerciality and quantity of adoption by the masses.⁸¹ Put more succinctly, in an attempt to make people 'think again', lower-class culture became the dominant model as middle-class white youth, 'in defiance of their parents', adopted the youth culture of urban blacks and white proletarians.⁸² As well as borrowing the cultural vocabulary of the working-class - the radical elite peppered conversations with obscenities and street slang - their physical appearance was also copied. For instance cultural 'workers' took to wearing 'unrespectable' macho proletarian fashions, reminiscent of the oily battered boiler suits of blue-collar workers,⁸³ in order to eradicate social stereotyping from conventional mindsets which ignored their own status as workers, and the value of workers *per se*.

May'68 and the Radical Gestures of Political Theatre

To précis, then, though May'68 may have collapsed, its *cultural waves* - what Nina Fishman calls the Continental 'New Left' - 'hit Britain like a ton of bricks'.⁸⁴ It comes as no surprise, therefore, to learn that these political, aesthetic and cultural theories were adopted, knowingly or not ('in the late 60s people absorbed a lot of things but without knowing it'/these ideas do travel quite slowly'⁸⁵), by British political-theatre writers, workers, and theorists. On a general note, Roland Rees in his book *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre* (1992) records that, post'68, the philosophy of what he chooses to call new theatre, derived from the cultural politics of that time. The inspiration for its work came from its connection with the larger sub-culture which articulated its ideas through political demonstrations, drugs, rock and roll, the underground press and an attitude to the world wholly in opposition to its parents. There was a wide feeling amongst younger people for change."There was an aspiration to do something new and at that time 'new' had a good reputation. You were on

⁸¹ Hobsbawn, p. 514.

⁸² Hobsbawn, p. 331.

⁸³ Hobsbawn, p. 331.

⁸⁴ Green, p. 246.

⁸⁵ Green, pp. 282/379.

the edge of a transformation of political, personal, social and economic relations and...wanted theatre to be part of that transformation".⁸⁶ More specifically Jeff Nuttall of the influential People Show, states quite clearly that, although much of the politics of the period was politics with a 'small p', it was undoubtedly interfaced and laced with the ideas of the *Situationniste Internationale*, as this concise summary seems to prove:

I had a faith that, given liberation, the human creative spirit would predominate. I imagined some kind of a Stone Age village, really. People would build their own houses imaginatively and live there sophisticatedly and in a literate way and with a total permissiveness and that they would live with their hands and their minds and they would not be dictated to by anybody selling them anything and they would not welcome anybody preaching to them. Eventually...people would actually have the opportunity of coming into their true self, which was generous and creative and permissive...We didn't believe in programmes and we didn't believe in law.⁸⁷

In line with these ideas, the first performances of the People Show, rather than following theatrical laws of text, characterisation, and unity of time and place within a recognisable theatre space, took place in the basement of Indica, an avant-garde bookshop in London's West-End. Rather than hire actors, Nuttall and an accomplice simply put on an 'exhibition of ourselves' - their own bodies became the artwork. Making a piece of art out of the human body, had an anti-elitist aspect because, in refusing to adopt literary culture, or confine himself to a separate specialised performance space, Nuttall brought art down to earth. The body could also be re-quantified as an egalitarian means of aesthetic production for everyone possesses a material body, and so *inter alia* everyone owns a piece of art. Moreover, the People Show stayed close to Situationist thinking in that, if the SI identified the need to revolutionise the everyday and everyday fields of experience, there is nothing more commonplace than the body. Nuttall's art was therefore located in the everyday. Sexuality was also central to the piece as a screen was used as a blank canvas

⁸⁶ Roland Rees, *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre*, (London: Oberon Books, 1992), p. 10. Rees's book cites the moment and generation of '68 several times in this useful study of the relationship between the late sixties and the development of radical theatre thereafter. However, the focus of the text is broadly on the influence of American counter-culture on political theatre and post-'68 theatre groups such as *Foco Novo*, not Situationist theory.

⁸⁷ Jeff Nuttall cited in Green, p. 258.

from which the performer's abdomen, finger, and penis protruded. Sexual - and aesthetic - taboos were broken further when the invited audience were encouraged to express their aesthetic or erotic desires by touching the warm bodies - the works of art.⁸⁸

Because the body parts sticking out of the flat façade were suggestive of seaside photographic backdrops, the ubiquitous end-of-pier entertainment pieces within which one is free to adopt a smutty postcard persona, the People Show indicated the value of proletarian culture. In a later piece called *stigma*, the elitism or pretensions of high culture was undermined when art was reduced to crawling through a tunnel full of feathers whilst the voice of William Burroughs played on a crude tape recorder. Unlike a piece of art, *stigma* resembled a child's game; the artist's creative use of space making a new ambient place simply from the underneath of a bed or other found environment. In a Situationist sense, it highlighted the possibility of useful play, it was made for fun. *Stigma* also eschewed the values of 'work' in its lazy preparation, and so alerted the participants to the possibilities of DIY aesthetics. Because it refused to adhere to patriarchal bourgeois ideals of good, serious, or valid cultural productions - the work of past masters or complex and technologically plush theatre productions - the piece exhibited a strong aesthetic anti-authoritarianism. The bed-crawl indicated that one did not have to be competent or qualified to make art, instead its law of art said there was no law, though this was a law in itself. Through his tatty and shoddy gestures, Nuttall similarly refused to be associated with factory-made products or commercial theatre's spectacular commodities. With entrance to the event free, The People Show made the counter-culture's anti-trade gestures overtly emphatic. Finally, in *The People Show*, the audience did not passively spectate or consume art, but got close to it, took part in the event.

The People Show, however, offers an extreme example of the kind of performance event which displayed a thoroughgoing Situationist logic in its aesthetic form. It is at the far end of the spectrum and remains close to the avant-garde's anti-intellectualism and traditional adoption of apparent meaningless Dada-flavoured aesthetics. But these ideas and theories also filtered into mainstream performance aesthetics, in particular, political theatre, with a small and large 'p', throughout the next decade. In fact it is fair to say, that a recognisable Situationist logic did not establish itself in certain plays or

⁸⁸ Jeff Nuttall in Green, pp. 58-59.

theatre aesthetics - as it did not in the wider cultural field - until the early or mid-seventies.⁸⁹

A better illustration of this slow but sure political and aesthetic osmosis can be traced in Stephen Lowe's 1978 adaptation of Robert Tressell's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Whilst this was not a Situationist play, performed throughout the tenth anniversary of May'68, from here it looks like a determined reaffirmation of the very Situationist aesthetics, politics, and cultural theory which underpinned the ten years of political drama I will be analysing below. To begin with, the play critiqued the conventions of the divisions of labour under capitalism into the specialised roles of workers 'by 'hand' and 'workers by mind'. As an alternative it volunteered the need for participatory workers' councils. Writing after the event, Lowe admitted that the whole performance, from rehearsal to execution, was an exploration of 'new ways of working' and purposefully moved into the areas explored by the new left in the late sixties.⁹⁰ Staying close to the Situationist logic I outline above, the play condemned political reformism:

Owen: it's a dead end. If we go into their game, if we enter their House of Parliament on the back of the unions, they'll just buy us off. We've got to hold out for the works, not go for the crumbs...We don't need them. Let's band together not to bargain but to own. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act 2/3*)

What is more, Joint Stock workers actively lived out the very content of the production, a radical gesture, for sure, when they organised and created a working environment redolent of the anti-hierarchical/pro-autonomy syndicates and workers' councils endorsed by the SI. Group meetings/assemblies were held to openly discuss financial and political issues. In contrast to authoritarian directorial-style rehearsals, actors directed, wrote, and set their own aesthetic agenda, and so contributed to the making of the play. Throughout the 'making of the production', Lowe was at pains to tie theatre to the status of capitalist commodity, with its own actor/workers, so drawing a clear comparison with their manual counterparts in industry.

⁸⁹ Farren, p. 234.

⁹⁰ Stephen Lowe, *Joint Stock and The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists: Letters from a Workshop*, Dartington Theatre papers No 2, Series 111, p 5.

In a more explicit attempt to fold their own experiences in with those of the working class, as well as offering another gesture of solidarity, the company took it upon themselves to positively 'downsize', and embraced proletarian lifestyles or roles. They agreed to prepare for the play in which they had to act as workmen by working to restore and convert a disused warehouse situated, appropriately enough, in a working-class district of Plymouth. To achieve this, parallel to the Paris students of the barricades, the actors worked alongside real painters and decorators. During this rapprochement the theatre workers of Joint Stock made it clear to the carpenters and painters they were working with that they too had a contract with a notional 'employer', The Arts Council, and that they unionised because they were also open to capitalist exploitation, deadlines, and financial restrictions as waged cultural producers.

The influence of the Occupation Movement can be seen further because, by turning a previous site of industry into an 'urban' rehearsal space for the local college drama students, Joint Stock converted a work-space into a play-space. What is more, by re-claiming a physical space in a working class area, a space held hitherto by capitalism, the company, in theory, made theatre and art available for the working-class community to re-claim theatre back from bourgeois culture. By exposing their own skills, modes of working, and on-the-job praxis to the workers (as we have seen, they juxtaposed their drama workshop practice equally with time spent learning and acquiring the skills to build and restore useful property) Joint Stock invited workers to see that the art of theatre was also a form of work. *Ergo* if the actors could learn carpentry then the workers could, in theory, become actors and so, take an active, rather than passive, part in the making of the production, a transition ultimately embraced when the workers recited poems and sang with the group.

May'68 and Situationist associations are evident in several other ways. For instance, mirroring the student placards we see around the Night of the Barricades - urging "The Workers Will Take the Torch of Revolution from the Fragile Hands of the Students"⁹¹ - Joint Stock's production ended with the unifying banner "Workers of the World Unite". At break-time actors sought to educate the real workers by improvising 'the Money Trick', a Marxist critique of capitalist economics from Tressell's book, in a simplified form understandable to the workers. Knives stood in for the means of production and pieces of bread for capital or commodities produced by their work (Marx's 'surplus value').

⁹¹ Reader, p. 13.

Equally, if graffiti was Situationist politics made communicable in proletarian form, then Lowe and Joint Stock mediated their message in similar working class idioms. A long way from resembling a wordy complex tract, the dry black and white oblongs Rowbotham identifies, the play was made to be fun, peppered with popular songs and comedy. A point about the perceived reticence of the working class to discuss politics, for instance, was made through the catchy ballad 'A Pair of Black Eyes' as Joint Stock engaged with the culture of the class it hoped to influence politically.

Put differently, political theatre activists came to understand, with Farren and others, that post-'68 the ideological effectiveness of their theatre depended upon the *form of the message* rather than simply the content. By adopting the forms of the working class, these songs, though more prevalent in the Edwardian period, advertised the company's solidarity and valuation of popular music *per se*, for reconfigured within the period of the 1970s the gesture displayed solidarity with the pop and rock culture blasted out of transistor radios in factories and other modern-day work places. As a consequence the hitherto elitist bourgeois theatre was disturbed, transformed into a different kind of space, more proletarian, occupied with the representations of the abstract characters of that class and its very real everyday cultural choices. Joint Stock's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* ousted the dry naturalism of orthodox bourgeois theatre and replaced it with the sights and sounds of proletarian everyday life.

Taking this idea of transformation one step on, the theatre space became, to all intents and purpose, a hypothetical building site because the set for the play was constructed from scaffolding poles which supported planked platforms, leaning ladders, trestles, paint pots, and wallpaper. Throughout, therefore, the play and the theatre took on the sensory sights, sounds, and smells of a real work place as 'The men work continuously on the house, around, behind, between, above and in front of the audience'. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* Act 1) With paint and wallpaper-paste slopping around the stage space, the performance resonating with the sound of sandpaper upon wood, the hitherto clean atmosphere of theatre was disturbed. Strategically speaking this fusion of theatre and workplace highlights Joint Stock's attempt to close the physical and social space between the workers and the work environment. It also looked to challenge those in the audience who simply engaged with the proletariat on a purely spectacular or theoretical plane, whilst ultimately remaining intellectually and politically removed. This was not

simply a fanciful device. Lowe recalls how at his own university Tressell's book about manual labour and working-class life was not read and so downsized to the space of non-literature, ultimately non-art, a reminder of the way that manual work and its attendant work spaces – building sites or factories – are often also alien *non-environments* for the educated and literary theatre-going class.

This closure of the space between intellectual and worker was, however, arguably, only achieved in an abstract sense. Lowe for one was aware that it sounded a 'bit Wanky', particularly when *The Guardian* thought it enough of a cultural gesture to publish photographs of the cast 'going native'.⁹² But, that said, at the very least, Joint Stock were attempting to try to say something new about work and its social and symbolic status. As the Situationists pointed out one must end all specialisations and separations, and in this play we do see actors doing manual work and manual workers undertaking dramatic work. Both were shown capable of each. Similarly, by taking on an elitist form of expression - the theatre - and putting on a play about manual work, Joint Stock's radical gesture changed work's cultural framing and low status in the existent hierarchy of types of labour. For example, many of the leftist intelligentsia might have appreciated or valued classical painting as a valid art, whilst attaching no value or prestige to house painting or painters and decorators, a prejudice which maintained - and still sustains - the artificial separations of art and work, elitist culture and everyday life assailed by the SI. To address this bias the actors, when working in front of the audience, showed that as a practice craftwork is indivisible from those other aesthetic or intellectual practices appreciated by modern society. A case in point is a scene in which the predominantly middle-class spectator was confronted with workers engaged in creative activity, ecstatically lost in their work - reminiscent of revered artists - intellectually as capable as the culturally sanctified designer:

Owen: pick out the window. Good window. Let's the light in. Light. Sky beyond. A pattern across the walls and ceiling. A Moroccan. Same basic pattern, simple pattern but twisting and turning through a cycle. Developing as it goes. Flowing round and round the walls. Like sitting in a room full of music. Walls picking up, embroidering, replaying the same basic theme. A theme in gold. Gold leaf not paint. Don't spoil it for a

⁹² *Letters from a Workshop*, p. 14.

a'porth of tar. Gold leaf on a clean white base. I could do someat wi' that. Someat wonderful. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act1/4*)

This sketch was important because through its execution Joint Stock made the artificial line between craft, culture, and art somewhat blurred. Moreover, useful work – work done away from capitalist exploitation and profit seeking - was shown to be a potential vehicle of joy, transporting the active participant Owen into the utopian new world of play, as play and work in this performance became fused together as the SI said it should. The attractiveness of creating this new playful situation through alternative working practices was indicated later in the play when the audience were shown workers becoming spiritually alive when transported to a post-survival world of utopian plenty. In *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* utopia was represented by the annual 'Beano', wherein actors offered an image of workers playing games, singing, and engaging in other recreational playful pursuits. By contrast, and in keeping with its own Situationism, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* showed that men driven towards psychotic states are those who adopt workaday roles, particularly those in authority and power, within capitalist modes of production. To emphasise to the audience, however, the provisional status of these roles, and their possible evasion, actors 'changed' in front of the eyes of the audience, and took on the attitudes of the boss with the simple adoption of an article of fashion, and so emphasised the transitory, though real, power of the commodity in the society of the spectacle.

Situationist lessons about the abstract and harmful nature of repetitive stereotypical performances, in all aspects of everyday life, became exemplified in the company's own experience of rehearsing the play. After doing a morning of manual work, for instance, the actors spent the afternoon playing games. These games, in contrast to mundane work, were fun. Pretending to play at being an Edwardian father, child, master, or worker, the cast lost themselves in imaginative open-ended playful activity. It was work, to be sure, but enjoyable, and, in contrast to the labour of renovating the warehouse, preferred to the building work which, as the project progressed, came to be avoided at all costs. This is a very interesting point for here it was the actors in the cooperative who, on the face of it, were learning Situationist or Marxist theory, not the audience or carpenters they lectured. In a paradoxical way it was they who were ideally placed to contrast the positive nature of theatrical work with that of common proletarian work - their own output and modes of production were more like

'Friday afternoon at school' than the hard work of the builders and carpenters they had come to know.⁹³ Armed with a large selection of fashions and modes of dress, actors explored the transitory nature, and mutability of psychological and social change, whilst at the same time reinforced the pleasure inherent in childish play, and so, by default, discovered the 'insanity' of joyless work the Situationists say the masses experience. More cutting still, the nature of the self, and its potential for multiple transformations, particularly for the proletarian subject, was driven home to the company when the writer and director attacked the actors for portraying the workers as 'unchanging': the actors portrayed the workers as vulgar, 'stereotypically picking their noses and farting'.⁹⁴ These new political theatre workers, therefore, were no longer autonomous agents of didactic agitprop, imparting intellectual or political doctrine as teachers lecturing the audience, but were, in theory, encouraged to become students engaged in dialectical change, their own minds being also re-occupied with different ideological concepts of working class existence.

The influence of May'68 and the SI can be traced in other common gestures. The poster for the production of *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was designed 'on site' by an ordinary painter - rather than in a studio space by a trained artist or graphic designer - and so Joint Stock repeated the *École Beaux-Arts* radical gesture of opening screen-printing studios to workers during the *événements*. During the time/space of the play, Lowe represented Reich's theories about the corruption of natural sexuality and exploitation of women in modern societies by highlighting the crude and immature attitude to sexuality, pornography, and sexual oppression, stubbornly present in working-class culture. *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* represented poverty to be a cultural phenomenon, as well economic. An attempt at worker and intellectual, artist and proletarian rapprochement was made as the actors ventured into the working class community to 'make contact' with single mothers, factory hands, prostitutes, drunks, and local everyday life in general.

Situationism, Homology, and Political Theatre

But *why*, post'68, was Joint Stock and, more pressingly, the broader British political theatre, engaged with Situationist theory in the first place? A logical explanation can be found in the theatre worker's and playwright's

⁹³ *Letters From a Workshop*, p. 22.

⁹⁴ *Letters From a Workshop*, p. 8.

determined search for *homology*. Homology is a term used widely in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.⁹⁵ Bourdieu argues that the social space as a whole is separated into different sub fields. A sub field might be what he identifies as the 'cultural space'. There are also economic, religious, literary, aesthetic, political, sexual, even what he calls mental spaces.⁹⁶ Although divergent these social fields are all sites of struggle within which social agents are arranged into dominant and dominated classes. For example, in the economic sphere there may be the rich and poor or capitalists and workers. One is exploited, oppressed or repressed by the other. But all other fields of endeavour, whether they be those of art, theatre, or political parties often behave in the same way, because they possess the same hierarchical structures. In political terms, party organisations, trade-unions, and radical intellectuals form comparable configurations of the dominant and dominated. Intellectuals exclusively produce the ideas which steer revolutionary or socialist ideology, whilst party bureaucrats or union leaders hold a certain political domination/authority over the dominated proletarian masses. Taking the logic of sites of struggle one-step further, this means that, between these sub-fields, there exists *similar struggles*. Bourdieu calls these 'structural coincidences' in which all sites exhibit certain recognisable forms of repression, exclusion or exploitation. The idea of structural coincidences is particularly helpful, here, because in dominant leftist thinking, pre Situationist, say, the economic space was broadly considered to be the dominant field of socialist struggle whilst other fields, the fields of sex, culture, psychology, consumerism, and literary production had to accept a less-dominant position in the hierarchy of revolutionary theory. By contrast Bourdieu argues that, though ultimately linked to the economy, social agents experience repression and exploitation in these fields, too. Put differently, Bourdieu notes that these disparate fields of struggle, and the agents within them, will display certain *similarities in difference*, a certain sameness he ultimately calls 'homologies'.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994) for a broader exposure of the theory and explication of homology.

⁹⁶ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 14-15, and section 'Homology and the Effects of Misrecognition', pp. 214-216.

⁹⁷ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 29. Interestingly, Bourdieu warns against treating a homology of position – a resemblance within difference – as an 'Identity of condition' – a theory developed in 'the ideology of the three P's', *patron, père, professeur* – 'boss', 'father', 'teacher', a philosophy, he says, ultimately 'developed by the ultra-left movement in France in the late 1960s'. *Language*, p. 245. But this, in a sense, makes my point for me about the prevalence of homological thought circulating around post-'68 drama. Besides, this caveat seems to be one which is a disclaimer for his own work. Because, on the whole, Bourdieu,

As we have seen, a similarity in difference or structural coincidence existed between the libertarian leftism of the British counter-culture and that of the unified *weltanschauung* of the Situationist International. The SI's comprehensive philosophy of human life sought to unite all forms of everyday struggle with the forms of expression relevant and idiomatic to everyday life. Like the SI, the British avant-garde sought to unify revolutionary socialist theory with revolutionary content. In this sense their theoretical and political sameness was *homological*. Both groups looked to homogenise political critique by attacking every aspect of personal existence, and so created connective alliances between all forms and moments of repression, oppression, and exploitation, whether it be in the space of the street, asylum, bedroom, supermarket, university, cultural aesthetics, or theatre. Moreover, given their anarchistic unitary bent, Situationist theory fitted theoretically with the rebellious lifestyle of the British avant-garde. The fact that Situationism was sidelined, its promoters persecuted in France because it was deemed threatening to that nation's way of life, was homologous to how the OZ counter-culture troubled the British bourgeois class. Their rejection in common also signified that the two shared a structural coincidence or position of cultural domination, a homology of repression. Furthermore, the forms of communication the SI used, in particular the adaptation of comic strips for political ends, had their homological counterpart in the OZ generation's enchantment with children's comic books. The SI's affirmation of insanity over a sane orthodoxy was structurally coherent with the anti-psychiatric doxa of Laing's alternative communities. The Situationist's promotion of a Reichian sexual revolution spread during the *événements* was consistent with the radical promiscuity we see promoted in Britain i.e. although different, the SI and British counter shared what Raymond Williams identified as a common 'structure of feeling',⁹⁸ or, what Farren identified as 'thinking-in-common'.⁹⁹ And, because British political theatre was an extension or sub-field of the wider Anglo-Saxon avant-garde, we can see the structural homology Joint Stock and political playwrights like Wilson, Brenton,

whilst not looking for identities of condition, broadly makes parallels between all diverse and multiple fields of struggle. That said, I, too, do not seek to blindly submit to making identities of conditions, but, where appropriate, point to the *disconnections* between homologies. For example, I show how the plays themselves undermine the homological struggles of the political middle-class theatre goers and theatre workers with that of the British working class. I also make the observation that making a revolutionary political play is not the same as making revolution.

⁹⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism And Literature* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), see Chapter 9 'Structures of Feeling', pp. 128-135.

⁹⁹ Farren, p. 23.

Hare, and Griffiths had with the SI. Put differently, British political theatre and the Continental radicals possessed a *concurrent world vision* - similarities in difference - in which these two identifiable groups met at the juncture of homological thinking.

In highlighting this thinking in common, the reader might anticipate, I expect, that British political theatre, and the playwrights I, and others, mark out as '68ers, were thoroughly conversant with Situationist thought, literature, and gestures. But to imply that to be influenced by the *événements* and SI one must have been acutely aware of the very theories that made May'68 what it was, a revolutionary period of new radical ideas, political codes and articulations, is to suggest that a whole embryonic corpuscle of political theatre activists, writers, and workers had the *Internationale Situationniste* ready to hand. This would not only be unrealistic, but a distortion of the facts. Far more sensible is to accept that, as the underground press and other events mirrored and distributed Situationist-flavoured ideas into the consciousness of the nation's counter-culture, we can best speak of the appearance of a homological *Situationist logic*, a set of assumptions, modes of analysis, interpretations, and visions of the future that seeped into the wider counter-cultural landscape. It is therefore this adopted logic, whether conscious or unconscious, purposeful or by accident, overt or covert, accurate or inaccurate, which I will be arguing indisputably underpins post-'68 political theatre.

However, political theatre's quest for homology went beyond finding international theoretical allies. The search reached into the heart of all modes of aesthetic practice as theatre workers looked for positive (or negative) homologies within their own cultural and social fields. For example, when the actors of Joint Stock made a connection between their own status as workers - they had a hypothetical employer, product, and deadline to meet - with other exploited workers of Britain, this was their way of signalling a social homology. The connection political plays made between the domination over one's own personal body in bourgeois sexual repression and that of its wider domination in the economic sphere was homological because it sought out similarities in difference between taking control of the means of sexual production and industrial production; the public and private space were remade comparable sites of struggle. In Nuttall's *bedcrawl*, the radical artist made a union between the need to rebel against the paternalism of both the familial and political orders, an order of things which demanded that all children grow up and behave, ultimately, like the dominating bourgeois adults or authoritative political

figures political theatre was united against, because the piece subverted the paternalism of received serious art. By referencing the proletarian aesthetics of postcard humour in their piece performed in the London bookstore Indica, *The People Show* aimed to establish a homology between the need for the masses to take over the social space in demonstrations, say, with the concurrent requirement that the dominant field of art - epitomised by the bookshop - be supplanted, or reoccupied, with the culture of the dominated masses. Taken in a broader context, by diverting the revolutionary struggle onto the terrain of culture, art, sexuality, consumerism, or psychology, the radical gestures of political theatre were homological with those of the SI because they, too, challenged the predominance of the economic field - as well as orthodox Marxist theory - by selecting different, though interconnected, sites of struggle.

Political theatre's pursuit, or recognition of, the efficacy of homological thinking is further evident in its apparent agreement with Farren's observation that radical revolutionary theory, a philosophy which looked to bring about a proletarian revolution, had to be communicated in the forms of the repressed communities it looked to liberate from exploitation. When political playwrights realised that a union had to be made between the content of dissent and the forms of expression it deployed to subvert the order of things, this was a homological connection. For to communicate a revolutionary theory, an ideological force which asserted the importance of delivering the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the forms of articulation synonymous with the bourgeois epoch - the long and wordy tracts Rowbotham berates - would be to perpetuate a structural hierarchy.¹⁰⁰ In homology, then, it is not only social agents who are repressed or dominated, and consequently challenged to overthrow those dominating them. Comparable tussles go on inside and between fields of literary and aesthetic expression as well. In the field of culture this means that there will be a dominant and dominated cultures. Just as the bourgeois class dominate the working class in the economic and social space, bourgeois culture is the dominant mode of production which suppresses proletarian art, the art of those dominated in the economic sphere, in the cultural field.

Bourdieu's concept of the 'struggle within genres'¹⁰¹ is particularly useful in theorising this conflict between bourgeois and proletarian culture. It also

¹⁰⁰ I explore the connection between reinstating the proletariat and its culture in detail in chapters 2 and 4, which examine the Occupation Movement and political theatre's approach to culture at large. For instance, I suggest that convoluted political literature has its structural counterpart in the predominance of literary naturalism in bourgeois drama.

¹⁰¹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 187.

allows valuable light upon the aesthetics of political theatre, post'68. If we return to my proposition that, post-'68 dramatic praxis sought to unify its form and content, this means that theatre workers strove not only to create consistent homologies between *what* they said and *how* they said it (in the sense that proletarian liberation must be sought by simultaneously liberating proletarian art to express the need for this liberation), but that, whatever the field of reference, be it Anti-psychiatry, the promotion of workers' councils, sexuality, culture, or an attack on the spectacle, to remain theoretically consistent one had to make unitary homologies between the political content and idiomatic formal articulations of these dramas, too. That is, political playwrights moved the social and political conflict on two steps further. In the first instance they transferred the revolutionary struggle away from the economic field towards those areas I have just outlined. In the second phase they moved the struggle into the genre of theatrical form, itself. Indeed, it is this wider attention to a wholesale amalgamation of political struggle within both form and content that shapes the thesis' discussion *via* the concept of homology. Looked at from another angle, this research sets out to show that post-'68 dramatists procured a Situationist logic and applied it homologically in an attempt to subvert the *established cultural forms* of orthodox habitual theatre practice, as well society at large.¹⁰²

By referencing Griffiths' *The Party and Occupations*, or Cauter's *The Demonstration*, for example, the thesis explores how they and other writers refused to simply express their promotion of the political efficacy of the act of

¹⁰² The most blatant sign of an aesthetic homology - between what politicised theatre said, and how it communicated it - can be seen in the anti-hierarchical nature of many post-'68 theatre groups. For example their collective structure not only reflected the leaderless ethos of the broad May movement, specifically the Situationist refusal of authority and the political and cultural 'star system' maintained by the contemporary media, but connected the socialist utterances of political theatre with its socialised structural organisation. The theatre group Quipu, for example, was one of the first theatre companies to function as a collective of theatre writers committed to the establishment of a new kind of production organisation in which the means of production are owned, controlled, and developed by the artists whose work is being produced. Other groups like Agit Prop Street Players (later to become Red Ladder) showed homology with the SI by creating 'Situationist cultural events', *détourning* or 'modifying' posters on the London Underground, in protest against the Vietnam war (see Chapter 4 Culture). Reflecting the Situationist demand to communicate revolutionary theory in forms culturally biased towards a celebration of proletarian culture, although formed five years after the *événements*, Belt and Braces pioneered the use of rock music in a homological attempt to unify their pro-proletariat content and form. If Situationism was about reclaiming physical space, turning the street into a philosophical tract or art gallery, Foco Novo echoed this logic homologically in the performance which gave them their ultimate name: *Foco Novo*. Rather than accept the conventions and constraints of an established theatre building they staged the play in a garage in North London, used car-headlights for lighting, and played out the action in the lanes and streets surrounding the garage. But, apart from including some references to the working methods of Joint Stock and 7:84, this thesis is largely concerned about the homological connections between SI theory and, for want of a better word, orthodox playwrights and theatre. The thesis takes this approach, not merely because the efforts of these groups are captured comprehensively by Kershaw, Itzin, and Craig, which they are, but because I believe it is of more utility to existent theatre studies - as well as being what I am academically interested in.

occupation in their overt utterances - the content of the drama - but demanded that these plays delivered collective experiences by recreating the feeling of communal occupations through their formal articulations. These were radical gestures since bourgeois theatre is, arguably, an idiom of communication which historically has, like other articles of literature, imparted meaning by the monologic authorial function. By subverting this reliance upon the author as sight of political authority Cauter and Griffiths took the struggle to the authority of theatre as such, whilst, simultaneously, forging a structural union with the Occupation Movement which gestured to destroy the authority of political intellectuals and meetings *per se*.¹⁰³ At other junctures research tests out how political playwrights aimed to construct theatre experiences which not only highlighted the separation between workers and intellectuals, but looked to reduce this division concurrently in their politicised modes of anti-elitist formal articulations, whilst operating within the culturally isolated field of drama. Playwrights knew that buying a theatre ticket could not replace real involvement in the widespread chaotic occupations that informed the period. But by interpreting the fractured and disorganised way political meanings were made messy and ambiguous during factory and university open meetings, a political anarchy they reproduced through the fragmented form of their plays, I demonstrate that writers did conform homologically to a Situationist logic. Likewise, Edgar in *Mary Barnes*, and Brenton in *Christie in Love*, could not decamp the audience to the anti-psychiatric communes of Laing and Cooper, but they did strive to formulate homological unities with the excluded insane by making plays which appeared to be defiantly schizoid in their diverse dramatic forms. Similarly, Barry Keeffe in *Gem, Gotcha or Getaway*, Snoo Wilson in *Blowjob* and *Pignight* managed to promote the value of proletarian culture, whilst operating within the elitist and separatist space of bourgeois theatre, a genre they ultimately looked to destroy.

This prejudice towards analysing mainly political plays, with its inevitable textual analysis and reliance on published play-scripts, rather than alternative political theatre formations, leaves the thesis open to the criticism that it is inherently a literary survey. Moreover, selecting plays or performances which have an authorial voice (the playwright) would, apparently, be to weaken the

¹⁰³ For example, in their study of Trevor Griffiths, Mike Poole and John Wyver argue that in plays such as *The Party* (1974) and *Comedians* (1976) Griffiths' work represents 'a structural homology between the break-up of a dominant form of politics and the break-up of a dominant form of representation'. Mike Poole and John, Wyver, *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television* (London: BFI Books, 1984), p. 106.

thesis' homological rationale connecting political playwrights to a recognisable Situationist logic. Viénet, for one, argued that for any individual to become a notional leader of a potentially leaderless movement was to form another 'alternative' spectacle which 'hastily pasted over the revolutionary reality'. To become a director, writer, or theatre manager, even coordinate a collective, was to expose one's ignorance of the residual socialist spirit of May'68. The authorial playwrights were, like the leaders of the *événements*, 'speaking in the name of a movement they did not understand'.¹⁰⁴ By concentrating by and large on what may be dismissed as recognisably traditional drama (which usually retained some type of script and a unity of time and place), it would again appear that the thesis is misguided in pasting over the 'true revolutionary reality' of the political theatre post'68.

But it is this engagement with *conventional* political plays and playwrights which is the very point of the thesis. Rephrased, the purpose of the research is to study how political playwrights made unconventional theatre *within* the conventional. This was the radical Situationist gesture *par excellence* of a theatre shaped by the *événements*. After the Paris revolt, if you understood Situationist theory, it was unproblematic to *détourn* a London underground street poster or spray a wall of a British university with graffiti, but more problematic for playwrights and theatre workers to *détourn* theatre artefacts. Yet by taking the logic of graffiti – 'critical vandalism' – and transposing its socio-political import into dramatic products, political theatre did make homological connections between the struggle in the streets and those within the aesthetics of theatre. Put more concisely, the thesis enquires *how* did playwrights and theatre workers adhere to, manipulate, or reinterpret a coherent Situationist logic to fit their own radical project, whilst remaining within the extant field of literary and cultural production? For if Situationism was keen to infiltrate, destroy and occupy physical and cultural spaces for political and revolutionary ends, it must be homologically fitting to perform this radical gesture by a root and branch entryism at the point of bourgeois cultural production. By seizing the means of production, rather than setting up alternative or separatist counter-cultural activities – playing to its inevitable counter-cultural avant-garde audiences as alternative theatre groups did – political playwrights sought to subvert, even revolutionise, the space and time of orthodox theatre. And they did this again and again by purposefully constructing a thoroughgoing

¹⁰⁴ Viénet, p. 30.

homology between form and content. Hence the research project is at all times looking for homologies between the revolutionary content of political plays and the radical forms they were expressed in.

Structural Coincidences and the Reader

The thesis' engagement with structural homologies is not restricted to those that existed between form and content, or between plays and the SI or workers' struggles. Because of the social, cultural and chronological homologies the period established, these interrelations have repercussions for the way the thesis is structured, the themes it explores, the selection of subjects it reviews.

The thesis has also been constructed to be read within its own homological terms of reference and rhetorical strategies. There is no particular preference, for example, in which way the specific chapters are organised. Each intertwines and 'overlaps' into political themes and formalistic concerns contiguous to others. In the final chapter, for instance, I speak of the loss of self and struggle for human authenticity behind the artifice of the commodity in the society of the spectacle, but this has certain thematic coincidences with the idea of a Reichian character armour I explore in the third chapter, 'Sexuality'. Both the commodity and inculcated sexual repression disguise and subvert the nature of the self as presented in the social space. Homologically, the playwrights synthesised both of these tropes with plays which disrupt the nature of received realities or interpretation by subverting what is seen in the spectacle or character armoured self by making plays which either have their own character armour, or, alternatively, refuse to be a spectacle by exposing their own artifice. In Chapter 1 I outline how lunchtime theatre promoted the importance of positive play over negative work by making a 'poor theatre' shorn of any superficial properties except the presence of actors engaged in childish play. The political import of this poorness was that, with no scene setting or elaborate props, the audience had to *participate* in the show's meaning-making strategies by inventing the particular spatial event within their own imagination. By anticipating the need for human participation in radical play, this had a homological nexus with the spectator's need to participate in the drama itself. Moreover, participation and play are inextricable from political theatre's wider interest in 'participatory' workers' councils or 'communal' sexual relations, connections I explore in chapters 2 and 3. Conterminously, by promoting poor play over money-rich work, this poor theatre had a unity of purpose with the

anti-spectacle theatre extrapolated in Chapter 5. Except, the pared down use of stage artefacts we see articulated in the 'bare-stage strategy' was done to reinforce political theatre's call to refuse the consumer society, and ultimately the 'society of the spectacle'. But the two gestures are interrelated because to refuse participation in the spectacle of things is homologous to embracing participation in life *per se*, be it sexual relations, culture, politics, or revolution. All chapters and plays then, are interconnected – homological.

Similarly, by deciding on chapters which look at Anti-Psychiatry, the Occupation Movement, Sexuality, Culture, and the Society of the Spectacle, the thesis reflects the homological politics of the post-May'68 landscape, whilst, in unity with the literature surrounding the *événements*, it has no dominant or dominated chapters containing hierarchical themes or fields of spatial, political or aesthetic difference.

In navigating their way through the thesis, therefore, it is imperative that the reader think homologically, seeking common interpretative strategies, connections and similarities in difference. Whether it be between aesthetic approaches or radical cultural and political philosophies, the reader must exert thinking in common, reason *homologically*, rather than linearly or chronologically; there is, in a sense, *purposefully*, no structural *telos*.

For instance, the plays I cite in one chapter, can, more often than not, be evaluated from interchangeable theoretical angles I explore in another. Although as a rule I have subjected plays to a definitive conceptual reading, *AC/DC*, for instance, has been given an anti-oedipal analysis, the tacit dramatic signs it presents could have been rendered readable by implementing the alternative critical approaches I bring to light in Chapter 5 'Society of the Spectacle'. *Baby Love*, with its recognisable use of pop-music, although analysed in Chapter 3 'Sexuality', complies with the hypothesis forwarded in Chapter 4 'Culture', a section about why and how post-'68 political theatre hijacked pop/rock music as a suitable means for its own social, political, and cultural ends. Although located in Chapter 4 as an exemplary case of Hare's residual 'good culturism', *Teeth 'n' Smiles*, because of its 'behind the scenes' spectacle-busting strategies and clusters, fits neatly within a Society of the Spectacle diagnostic symptomology. This homological phenomenon is illustrated well by how Griffiths' *Occupations* and *The Party* crossover from the interpretative logic of the Occupation Movement into a critique of how political theatre and revolutionary dissent becomes a commodity in the spectacle. Although I don't develop the point, *The Party*, and *Occupations* to a lesser

extent, are perfectly compatible with the Reichian critique I develop in Chapter 3 'Sexuality', both plays making homological connections between sexual and political impotency.

Situationism vis a vis Political Theatre

Whilst reading the thesis it should be remembered that, though Situationist theory has thematic similarities with the wider British counter culture outlined in the introduction, it is *different* in that its assimilation by political theatre often owed more to osmosis than intellectual robustness. With this in mind Situationism must be brought to bear on political theatre itself. Because, read and quoted at source, it can be used to interpret and reinterpret post-'68 political theatre through Situationist theory *per se*. For in the last instance it is the relation between May-'68, an event underpinned by SI theory - the worldview in which it ultimately swam - that I am specifically involved with. Situationism is the field which ring-fences the sub-fields I critique, whilst excluding other fields of homological, though alternative, methodologies of interpretation.¹⁰⁵

For example, the Situationist-style gestures of political, social and aesthetic unity we see in the production practices of Joint Stock are themselves always open to a radical re-examination through that Situationism which surrounded them. This is a critical approach which ultimately accuses Joint Stock workers, despite their best intentions, of simply reproducing the physical, cultural, and social distance that remained between French workers, students, and intellectuals during the *événements* - what might be called an homology of

¹⁰⁵ Although I would argue that the thematic and formal clusters I isolate are symptoms of the environmental presence of a virulent Situationism, albeit filtered through an event or disparate phenomena known historically, and academically, as "Paris May '68", other readings do, of course, have a place in the influential nexus; though not here. One particularly thinks of the infectious influence of the ideas that spread from the USA on the output of British playwrights. The wholesale omission of Herbert Marcuse and his attack on the technological society, work, and repressed sexuality for example, is a case in point. When I speak of 'the society of the spectacle' - particularly the influence of mass media, notably the TV - one might explore the work of Marshal McLuhan's seminal 60s observation that 'the medium is the message'. The Yippies (YIP: Youth International Party) were also of some significance. On the British scene, 'thinking in common' could be extended to what became known as the New-Left, and whilst I do cite Raymond Williams - a radical thinker around whom the wider new-left intellectuals circled - a good look at the essays put out in *New Left Review*, most notably their switch to a Gramscian cultural analysis, would be more than relevant. That said, given the pervasive anti-Americanism gathering around the Vietnam war along with its synonymous relationship to western capitalism, the Situationist's own anti-Americanism provides a homology to back the SI reading, whilst the New-Left's association with 'good culturism' and promotion of access to culture, rather than its destruction, circumvents, to a degree, its relevance. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Enquiry into Freud* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987) and Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 1994), Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana, 1971), Michael Kenny, *The First British New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995)

failure. Rather than socialise with the local community in their cultural spaces and engage in their cultural expressions such as darts, Joint Stock 'workers' frequented upmarket wine bars, vacating public houses at the appearance of large groups of working-class women. Rather than live in the community in which they were attempting to show political solidarity, the actors stayed in country mansions found through advertisements in *Lady* magazine, disappearing on the first train back to London when the week's work was over. In contrast to their role-playing and dramatisation of the 'constructed' capitalist stereotypes in the production, the actors substantiate bourgeois conceptions of an immutable human nature, and thus society, by talking about the inevitability of capitalist modes of industrial and social organisation. They remained convinced of a survival of the fittest credo and a *laissez faire* ideology. Instead of embracing working-class culture as valid, refusing the artificial lines drawn between separate codes of cultural practice, the actors claimed the working class preferred 'lesser cultural' activities like dog racing over opera or theatre because they 'lack education'.¹⁰⁶ The group were part-time solicitors, married to 'movement' teachers, and embraced macro-biotic dietary regimes, preferring real coffee beans to instant coffee. Worse still, as Lowe points out, they lacked 'any political thought whatsoever'.¹⁰⁷

In short, their own performance or role as political or politicised revolutionary artists can be critiqued as only a *spectacle* of resistance; a piece of elaborate theatre. Like the Paris students decried as *Filles de Papa* (rich kids) - who, right wing critics claimed simply 'played at war' during the *événements*¹⁰⁸ - Joint Stock simply *played* at being politically engaged socialists. Their revolutionary gestures of resistance, choice of occupations, and political allegiances were as tentative as the consumer's choice of soap powders or radical students' simulated support for Trotsky or Sartre that Vaneigem and Debord outline. To be a political theatre worker or revolutionary was just another fashionable role allotted and recuperated by the commercial spectacle. Indeed the performance itself became simply a spectacular product to be consumed by the audience, setting itself apart from those consumers who watch TV.

Given this paradoxical aspect of post-'68 political theatre I will critique the theoretical anomalies of political theatre and its audiences through the very

¹⁰⁶ *Letters from a Workshop*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ *Letters from a Workshop*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Reader*, p. 18.

Situationist theories they both had adopted, particularly in Chapter 5 'The Society of the Spectacle'. Generally, however, I will read the plays *vis a vis* Situationist theory, through a simple comparative methodology. Consequently, where appropriate, I will make direct correlations between identifiable theories gleaned from the work of the SI and those same appropriated themes adapted to the needs of British political theatre. Chapter 2 'Occupations' is perhaps the part of the thesis which borrows most heavily from the actual events of Paris May'68 - particularly the activities of the 'Occupation Movement' - to overtly connect Situationist thought with the output of post-'68 political theatre. At other times, however, there are sections wherein the theories I employ will be those which reflect or complement Situationist writings indirectly or, to be more precise, homologically. Chapter 1 'Anti-Oedipus', for instance, makes an initial comparative analysis between Vaneigem's own ideas about madness, alongside his virulent anti-psychology, with those of the British anti-psychiatrists R.D. Laing and David Cooper, but ultimately uses the work of the latter to establish its own particular brand of Situationist logic. This is perfectly acceptable for, as Situationists maintained, espousing all bourgeois claims to original genius, they freely confess that they had come up with nothing innovative; they only put into words and action what everyone already knew.¹⁰⁹ In other sections, a Situationist logic will be applied via a diverse recourse to the revolutionary aesthetic and avant-garde thinking which established their own radical logic for, at bottom, Situationism is promiscuously plagiaristic. In Chapter 3 'Sexuality' and the section 'Culture', for example, I refer at various points, with varying emphasis, to the work of Reich, Dada, Surrealism, and what Stewart Home calls the 'utopianist tradition' to make a case for the presence of a post-'68 Situationist logic. There may even be gestures which, on the surface, owe nothing, or very little, to May'68 radical thought. In these cases, for the sake of continuity, I will bring in the writings of Vaneigem, Debord, and the extended SI, to broaden the reader's understanding of their ideas, and, also, to demonstrate the importance and utility of Situationist theory *per se* - a valid analytic tool in its own right. In this mode the analysis, will, as it were, be writing back to political theatre with an explanation of its own codes and unconsciously assimilated Situationism.

¹⁰⁹ Vaneigem, p. 17.

Clusters, Symptoms, and Identification

Selecting only plays performed or written within the period 1968-1978, however, raises certain questions about selection that need explaining. For example, it means that the thesis necessarily excludes paradigmatic productions which could provide commendable evidence of the echoes of the May'68 socio-cultural big bang we can still detect in plays written beyond 1978. David Edgar's *Teendreams* (1979) or *Maydays* (1983) are just two examples.¹¹⁰ Although written by Trevor Griffiths sixteen years after the period in question, his play *Real Dreams* (1984) was obstinately preoccupied with the late-sixties counter culture and its radical youth, whilst, like his earlier plays *Occupations* and *The Party*, it examined the associated successes and failures of Paris (and Britain) circa 1968.¹¹¹ However, to contain the thesis, its breadth had to be limited to a ten-year period.

That said, brevity is not the only explanation for the work's chronological boundaries. If the thesis is in dialogue with received research, a collaborative effort *adding* to the excellent and invaluable work already done, this has some bearing on the historical breadth of the dissertation, too. *Dreams and Deconstructions*, for instance, though contemporary enough to engage with plays prevalent up to 1980, scans the same decade I have selected. Bull might take his examination up to 1983, but this is only achieved with a short chapter 'On the Edge of the Eighties; Developments'.¹¹² In real terms the period under critical scrutiny is 1968-1978. *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre Since 1968* saw the light of day in 1978, and so clearly only covers ten years, while, Ansorge's work, written in 1975, is firmly rooted in the late sixties or what we might call the high seventies. To précis, because the thesis is *connected* to these different books, it seems simply appropriate to deal with the same period in time as them.

Equally, it seems also coherent to deal with the same playwrights as Craig, Bull, Itzin, Ansorge, and Kershaw. Arguably, David Hare, Howard Brenton, Trevor Griffiths, and David Edgar are post-'68 political theatre's dominant writers, a sort of dramatic gang of four. In *New British Political Dramatists* and *Stages in the Revolution* they are allocated a chapter each, while Snoo Wilson, Howard Barker, Stephen Poliakoff, Heathcote Williams, and Barry Keeffe form the backbone of what Steve Grant identifies in *Dreams and*

¹¹⁰ David Edgar, *Plays:3* (London: Methuen, 1991).

¹¹¹ Trevor Griffiths, *Trevor Griffiths: Plays : 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

¹¹² Bull, p. 195-228.

Deconstructions as the 'new writers' ¹¹³ of post-'68 political theatre, as well as receiving varying amounts of page space in *Disrupting the Spectacle*, *The Politics of Performance*, and *Stages in the Revolution*. Albeit in shifting degrees, the theatre groups the thesis mentions, Joint Stock, 7:84 Scotland, Foco Novo, Portable Theatre and the Monstrous Regiment feature in all of the related texts. And, although it is in *The Politics of Performance* we see the fullest exposition of the political and cultural theories of John McGrath, his work is widely acknowledged in all of the books in question. David Caute is something of a missing link in the nexus I am describing between the thesis and the above critical studies, but his play *The Demonstration* (1969), with its contemporary occupation scenes, and chronological timeliness, is too relevant to May'68 to leave out.

Having said all of the above, chronology - or indeed a belief in socialist politics - is not my only criteria for plays or playwrights to be included or excluded in the research. Aside from being a socialist playwright writing or practicing between 1968-1978, a third stage of selection depended upon those theatre workers or writers making performances or dramatic artefacts which display *significant post-'68 clusters* - clusters which offer clear evidence of Situationist influence. Apart from the examples I identified in the opening paragraphs, post '68 we begin to see the materialization of multiple depictions of factory or university occupations. Other political playwrights began to make direct and indirect historical references to either Paris May'68, Situationism, or Situationists. Characters written into plays 'typified' the social stereotypes who made May'68 what it was. Alongside lionised revolutionaries, *enrages* and workers, we get multiple representations of the reviled counter-revolutionaries - trade unionists, Stalinists, Capitalists, reformist MP's, spectacular revolutionaries, and proletarian consumers. We start to see the widespread use, and critique of, the medium of TV. Other May'68 clusters include the use of mixed media, a comprehensive use of pop music, (particularly records associated with May'68), the promotion of other forms of proletarian low-culture over bourgeois high culture, a plethora of references to schizophrenia and schizophrenics, alongside an overarching concern with the reversal of the categories of personal and social sanity and insanity. As we have seen, plays also commonly featured the promotion of a sexual revolution alongside a wider promiscuity in all aspects of everyday life (particularly art and politics), as well

¹¹³ See Craig, pp. 116-144.

as a thoroughgoing awareness of the conceptual framing of the 'society of the spectacle'. To summarise, then, the plays chosen have been selected because the clusters of symptoms they present support my main proposal that, unconsciously or not, these plays, playwrights, and theatre workers were influenced by a notional Situationist logic.¹¹⁴

What this means for the research in a wider intellectual context is that the work, having identified these clusters as symptoms of a irrefutable Situationist causal link, aspires to provide the reader with a tentative epidemiological template (a means of diagnosis) to interpret and understand the environmental and philosophical forces which, spreading out from May'68, 'over-determined' post-'68 political theatre into the particular formal and political articulations it imparts.¹¹⁵ The thesis aims to be an empowering how-to-identify-post-'68-political-theatre study tool. It asserts quite strongly, along with other theoretical writings, that there is an identifiable phenomenon acknowledged as *Post-'68 British Political Theatre*, a drama distinctly different in shape and meaning-making from a political theatre antedating the événements.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ The political plays I cite above as being outside my chronological field of reference, also, of course, are mentioned because they display the same clusters or symptoms of those included in the thesis. Both anti-capitalism and anti-Stalinism are prevalent in *Maydays*. The play was a critical assault on the failures of Russian communism, illustrated by Edgar through the examination of the Soviet invasion of Hungary 1956, an act of aggression synonymous with the wider crisis of communism. Its politics, too, were incoherent, confused and contradictory, identified below as the modish 'messy politics' of a Situationist logic. There are direct references to Paris May'68, the wider international student insurrection, and the Occupation Movement (the play had ubiquitous or obligatory depictions of an 'occupied' university with anti-university slogans sprayed on its walls, and so on. *Maydays* therefore contained the identifiable clusters of those played about 'Occupations' analysed in Chapter 2. In *Teendreams*, because the British *énragés* were presented as *Filles de Papa*, or the May'68 narrative of proletarian revolution was compared to the fictional pictorial love-stories we still see in teenage girls magazines today (May'68 and after was reconfigured as a romantic dream - pure image), Edgar wrote a play which continued the contemporary attack on the society of the spectacle, a drama ripe for inclusion in Chapter 5 'the Society of the Spectacle'. Just as Barry Keeffe's *Gimme Shelter* trilogy, Stephen Poliakoff's *City Sugar*, and David Hare's *Tooth 'n' Smiles* weaved rock and pop into their formal aesthetic aspects to make broader points about the politics of culture, whilst making a strong distinction between the radical aspects of 1968 pop music and that of a fallen post-'68 pop culture we arguably see a decade later, *Teendreams* used pop and rock music for the same ends. Therefore, it, too, could have been inserted into Chapter 4: Culture. On a formal level, resembling his earlier May-'68 plays *Occupations* and *The Party*, in *Real Dreams* Griffiths transported video footage and large TV screens into the theatre space to express its overtly positive political meanings - the residual importance of social revolution - but also, more importantly, to articulate radical Situationist theory. The use of screens and film suggested the negative aspects of a commodified radical counter-cultural society reduced to representation through the lens of millions of western television screens; dissent made image. Again, although a political play outside my chronological remit, *Real Dreams* could have been included in my theoretical and cultural template. In this case, either Chapter 2 'Political Theatre and the Occupation Movement' or Chapter 5: 'The Society of the Spectacle'.

¹¹⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, (London New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 89-116.

¹¹⁶ If I am to justify the selection of plays, I need to provide an exposition of why I have excluded others who might be considered coherent May'68ers. The writings and dramatic radical gestures of Edward Bond and David Mercer, for instance, are obvious exclusions. But, I would argue, Edward Bond is not a typical '68er'. I am not suggesting there are not recognisable May '68 themes in his drama, for there are. In *Lear* (1970), for example, we see the familiar bipartite

attack on the East and West - Stalinism and Capitalism. In his later play, *The Fool* (1976), he concurred with the radical Situationist theory that 'capitalism created schizophrenia' but, overall, his plays are without the Situationist clusters so evident in the work of others. In *After Haggerty* (1970) Mercer broached the anti-paternalistic themes of anti-psychiatry, as well as providing an impotent political theatre reviewer, but, again, by and large, the telling symptomatic clusters, if not entirely absent, are diluted echoes of the May'68 philosophy I, and Craig *et al*, are concerned in connecting to the dramas presented. For a fuller discussion of Bond's work see Itzin, pp 76 - 88. To access further reading on Mercer see Itzin, pp. 91-101. See also David Mercer, *After Haggerty* (London: Methuen, 1970).

Chapter 1: Anti-Oedipal Theatre

Have you ever felt the urge to make love (not as a matter of routine but with great passion) to your partner or to the first man or woman to come along, or to your daughter, or your parents, or your men or women friends, or your brothers or sisters.

Ratgeb, *Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle*.

There are rules against seeing the rules, and hence against seeing all the issues that arise from complying with, or breaking them. Breach of rules, and rules against seeing rules, and rules against seeing rules against seeing rules, is met by deterrents in the first place, to forestall any breach of the system, and punishments in the second place.

Ronald D, Laing, *The Politics of the Family*.

There are two rules of aesthetics in the theatre. First rule: there are no rules. Second rule: because of the first rule, there cannot be a second.

Howard Brenton, *Brenton: Plays: One*.

Everything must always be "nice, neat and orderly" for a paranoid machine.

Rolando Perez, *On An(archy) and Schizoanalysis*.

A Festival of Madness

At the Royal Court's *Come Together* (1970), a festival of alternative theatre, participating dramatists confronted the audience with a diversity of sexualised images. Group sex and rape featured alongside blunt references to homosexuality and sado-masochism.¹ Howard Brenton's *Christie in Love* (1969) presented the audience with the spectacle of a dimly lit actor who loudly 'fucks' a female dummy.² At the same event, Heathcote William's play *AC/DC* (1970) confronted spectators with graphic scenes of female masturbation when the character Sadie performed simulated sex with photographs of pop and media stars rolled up to simulate an erect penis. Conservative theatre critics saw little evidence of healthy erotica or sexual liberation in the performances offered at *Come Together*, though. Instead they readily accused post-'68 political playwrights of embracing a 'rhetoric of insanity'. In particular they attacked *Christie in Love* and *AC/DC*.³

In contemporary terms, the critics' conflation of sex and insanity was not an unusual association. Well into the late sixties and early seventies societal forces consistently labelled any form of alternative sexuality a perverse sign of mental illness

¹ Peter Ansgore, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975), p. 38.

² Vincent Guy, 'Come Together', *Plays and Players*, Vol 18, No 3, (1970), 30-31 (p.30.).

³ John Russell Taylor, 'British Dramatists: The New Arrivals', *Plays and Players*, Vol 18, No 5, (1971), 24-27 (p.24).

A perfect illustration of this categorical confusion can be seen in the *OZ* trial of 1970. *OZ*, as we have seen, advocated general physical gratification through 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll'.⁴ Foreshadowing *Come Together*, the underground publication advocated a lifestyle which celebrated all forms of sexual freedom, particularly an unfettered polymorphous perversity.⁵ 'Anything goes' was the publication's message. In *OZ# 28: The Schoolkids Issue*, for instance, the magazine stood up for the sexual rights of children. *OZ# 28* also featured a cartoon in which Rupert the Bear, the 'well loved childhood figure', was depicted having under-age sex with a grandmother, 'Gipsy Grannie'.⁶ In other pieces contributors discoursed on the positive effects of copulation in public places, penning articles on lesbianism, sadism, homosexuality, and sexual perversions. One article, 'Suck', contained written account of the joys, from the female perspective, of oral sexual intercourse. In the same copy a comic strip showed children indulging in sexual activities, and included a crude drawing of a boy and girl engaged in oral sex. The front and back cover carried pictures of naked women, one with a rat's tail protruding from her genitalia.⁷

The reaction of the establishment to *The Schoolkids Issue* was morally comparable to that which met the performances cited above.⁸ Under the Obscene Publications Act the editors were tried for colluding to produce 'divers, obscene, lewd and sexually perverted articles...with intent thereby to debauch and corrupt the morals of children and young persons within the realm to implant and arouse in their minds lustful and perverted ideas'.⁹ Found guilty they were and sentenced for up to 15 months. Prior to sentencing, however, it was suggested by the Judge that, in light of their sexual depravity, they be forced to undergo *psychological examination by a psychiatrist*, clear evidence of the negative homology contemporary society saw connecting sexual and mental health.

⁴ Jonathan Green, ed, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 382.

⁵ For instance, during *Come Together*, we see aesthetically permissive, or 'anything goes' 'mad' art, celebrated in Peter Dockley's *Foufowl*. Naked bodies covered in blue paint lay in troughs of chicken feathers as cockerels roamed across the stage to the amplification of their own calls, while, in a piece made by Carlyle Reedy, a dead fish was taken out of a coffin put upon an hook and swung inexplicably in the rays of a projector and then returned to a casket. Vincent Guy, 'Come Together', pp. 30-31.

⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 29 June, 1971.

⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 6 November, 1971.

⁸ When Snoo Wilson's *Pignight* (1971) toured Britain - a play featuring homosexuality, horrific violence, transgender dressing, and graphic sexual imagery - questions were asked in the British Houses of Parliament about the suitability of giving Arts Council money to 'such mimetic displays of depravity'. See Snoo Wilson, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999), p.3.

⁹ *London Evening Standard*, 30 June, 1971.

In sharp contrast the representatives of the alternative society argued in their defence that, the really sick or mad within the social sphere, were the orthodox cultural masses which considered themselves the paragon and model of decency, exemplified by the State itself. Rather than seeking to corrupt, Oz, they claimed, had a benevolent mission. It was just one more attempt among many other cultural manoeuvres (political theatre being one of the other mainstays of this assault), to bring about an alternative society; a culture different, but saner. And this new psychological state could only be achieved, they argued, by creating a more innovative and warmer human environment, one built upon experimental living with polymorphous sexual pleasure at its centre, rather than 'fear or guilt'.¹⁰

A Celebration of the Schizophrenic

In this new area of social conflict, then, the broad radical left moved away from political economy, and initiated a programme which realigned it with the mad who, like them, had been outlawed by society as insane. The quarrel over the distinction between what qualifies as sane and insane became a field of alternative politics. In particular, the counter culture turned to the plight of the schizophrenic - and schizophrenia *per se*. As an extension of the counter-culture, the radical's contemporary fascination with the schizophrenic inspired a significant cluster of works featuring images and references to the condition from post-'68 political theatre. *Christie in Love*, for instance, forced the audience to spend an hour with a schizoid killer - Christie - driven mad by internalised voices to commit necrophilia, whilst *Gum and Goo* purposely included a schizophrenic girl. Commentators described *AC/DC* as being essentially 'an evening spent with three schizophrenics'.¹¹ Written in the same year as *AC/DC*, Snoo Wilson created the schizoid Hans, a German farmhand in *Pignight* (1970). One year on, Snoo Wilson's *Blowjob* (1971) featured a schizophrenic young woman, Moira. To indicate her condition, the audience was told that, unlike the 'classic schizophrenic who has a democracy of three', she endures multiple minds reminiscent of a swarm of 'fruit flies' (*Blowjob* Act 2). In other sections *Blowjob* suggested Jesus suffered from depersonalisation, derealisation, delusions of persecution, and omnipotence, well-publicised symptoms of schizophrenia. Whilst not performed until the later part of the

¹⁰ *Daily Mail*, 29 July, 1971.

¹¹ John Russell Taylor, p. 27.

thesis' decade of analysis, David Edgar examined the world of the schizoid mind in *Mary Barnes* (1978), a piece which analysed the case history of a real schizophrenic, Mary Barnes.

Common cause with schizophrenia, and those who experience it, did not start with the manoeuvrings of the counter-culture or post-'68 political theatre, though. As will often be the case, the avant-garde and playwrights were saying nothing original. Before rising to prominence during the 1960s and 1970s, schizophrenia and madness had been the focal point for a broad band of post-war counter-cultural thinkers and artists. An exceptionally strong example of this pro-insane phenomenon can be found in the radical theories outlined by members of the Situationist International.¹² In *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, in defiant contradiction to nearly every other scientific discourse of the mind, Vaneigem argued 'there is no such thing as mental illness'. Mental illness in Vaneigem's schema was merely 'a convenient label for grouping and isolating cases where *identification* has not occurred' and 'those whom power can neither govern nor kill...[because they have not identified] it taxes with madness'.¹³

Identification, or the refusal of it, was central to Vaneigem's argument because, as the French Marxist Louis Althusser observed, identification marks the beginning of the child's ontogenetic journey towards normalised gendered adulthood. The infant must identify with the fixed permitted sexed codes and workaday roles recognised by a particular society's laws and culture, proscribed behavioural codes which ultimately forbid incest and other abnormal polymorphous desires. This immutable Law is woven within a culture's *language* which the child accepts as the transparent transmitter of a frozen reality. Binary phrases such as normal and abnormal, boy or girl, masculine or feminine, say, offer a site map of which side of the social stations good/evil or right and wrong one should embark. If all goes well the child arrives at what it has to be, accepting itself as a normal little boy or girl, with the right to become one day normal (heterosexual) 'like daddy, like mommy'.¹⁴

¹² Snoo Wilson and Heathcote Williams, for example, were influenced by the Situationists and Laingian anti psychiatry. Like Vaneigem and Laing, Williams believed that the mind of the insane or schizophrenic can shed some light on alternative ways of living. 'Where Mr and Mrs Jones - or Linear Man - are tuned only to one station, he's tuned to 18...He is saying "it's impossible to say this is your mind, this is my mind"'. Peter Ansorge, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975), p.79.

¹³ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), p. 137.

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1993), p.165.

Identification, however, is not only a case of identifying with one's biological parents, becoming *identical* to them, but with the wider political, social, and cultural paternal order, a structure the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan dubbed the field of the Other. Supporting Althusserian theory, Lacan maintained that it is only through social identification that individual and social cohesion can be maintained because identification actually *supports* – shores up - the *perspective* subconsciously chosen by the individual subject in the extant social/cultural field. He argued:

The identification of oneself with another being is the very process by which a continuing sense of self hood becomes possible, and it is from the assimilation of other people's attributes [and attitudes] that what is familiarly called the ego or the personality is constructed.¹⁵

That is to say, within the classical oedipal complex the boy/girl identifies itself with mommy or daddy, the feminine or masculine, assimilating their sexual, social, and economic attitudes which support his/her sense of being an authentic human self. The social field props up their sense of identity further because they can see themselves mirrored and supported by others who appear and act like themselves in accordance with the same prescribed rules and cultural values, they achieve perfect coincidence. The key point here is that rather than thinking of the ego or libidinal self as an autonomous entity, there takes place within the oedipal phase an act of *unconscious assimilation*, or borrowing, of pre-existent and universally gendered social roles singled out by the field of the Other as acceptable.¹⁶ At the same time this assimilation of attitudes - at bottom an acceptance of existential segmentation and separation - supports that society's State, its customs, laws and taboos (the State here being used in its sense as the guardian of the state of things). The continuous reproduction of identical social beings thus mirrors the existent state-of-things and reflects back to that same society, and vice versa, the received cultural image of what the state *is*, a petrified status quo which is accepted as an unchanging human reality.

Accordingly, for Vaneigem, it is their very failure or refusal to undergo identification that signalled the revolutionary potential he, and the wider avant-

¹⁵ Malcolm Bowie, *Fontana Modern Masters: Lacan* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 30-1.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 203.

garde, identified in the schizophrenic. In this reversed schema, having had the courage to negate what we might call oedipalisation, the schizophrenic was no longer configured as a deviant but paradoxically elevated to the radical subject *par excellence*. Schizophrenia was also considered revolutionary because - speaking universally - the schizoid attitude refuses to stay quiet about the ambivalence of morality or polymorphous bodily desire, a desire normally denied articulation in the civilised, cultured, and pathological field of the Other. For, if oedipalisation is the structuralisation and control of bodily desire by a 'repressive language'¹⁷ - one of the main causes of schizophrenia¹⁸ - schizophrenics, by logic, can be configured as revolutionary because they are *anti-oedipal*. For anti-oedipal thinkers, in refusing identification, schizophrenics remain, in theory, tenuously connected to some notion of natural, healthy or essential instinct, a state of being manifested in their un-coded and prescribed gestures of multiple personality and polymorphous perversity.

In his *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Vaneigem celebrated these universal deeply-rooted instincts as the *materia prima* of life, arguing that the schizophrenic's unrepressed primal demeanour is compelling evidence of the wider anti-authoritarian subject's residual 'will to live' naturally.¹⁹ Rolando Perez in his book *On An(Archy) and Schizoanalysis* (1990) puts the same argument differently when he writes that what radicals find in the schizophrenic is 'the child who is not afraid to smash our repressive machines'.²⁰ In summary, the avant-garde identified not with an oedipalised society but the rebellious psyche of the schizophrenic. This is a vital observation for in the schizophrenic the radical left recognised another alternative human totality with which they could - ironically - homologically *identify*, a personage that, though labelled mad or pathologically ill, was, in fact, like themselves, paradoxically sane. In counter-cultural terms the schizoid personality exemplified a structurally comparable insane/sane stance as the underground guerrilla for pleasure; a fellow revolutionary refusing to conform to 'the 'nit picking distinctions [made] by forensic pathologists' caring little for 'carefully-labelled glass jars marked heterosexuality, homosexuality, perversion, sadism, corporolia, normality and

¹⁷ Rolando, Perez, *On An[Archy] and Schizoanalysis* (New York: Autonomedia, 1990), p. 23.

¹⁸ Perez, p. 22.

¹⁹ Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, p. 200. In later work, which alters little theoretically or politically from text to text, Vaneigem, as his pseudonym, Ratgeb, endorses a thoroughgoing incestuous perversity, see epigraph #1 above and: Ratgeb, *Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle* (London: Elephant Editions, 1990), p. 20.

²⁰ Perez, p. 24.

deviance'.²¹ And, to turn full circle, it is the western counter-culture's new-found revolutionary homology with the struggles of the mad that explains why the political plays and performances I will analyse below, some already described above, evidence anarchic nihilistic schizophrenic figures who are sexually unrestrained, wilfully destructive, and ungovernable.

Anti-Psychiatry

Despite the undeniable fit between Vaneigem's theory and schizophrenic drama, I will not, of course, be asserting that all political dramatists were conversant with, or even aware of (even interested in) Situationist theory. Instead I will be arguing that playwrights were responding to the wider cultural focus on the political efficacy recognised in the schizophrenic mind, a radical view propagated by the popular works of the British Anti-Psychiatrists, R.D. Laing and David Cooper.²² In books such as *Self and Others* (1967) and *Death of the Family* (1971) they elevated the schizophrenic and the schizoid's logic to something approaching cult status. These radical texts, however, went much further than simply steering the wider underground towards a symbolic liberation of madness, the crazy acts and behaviour characteristic of the counter-culture, by advocating the very physical liberation of the mad from asylums and psychiatric institutions.²³ Unlike orthodox psychiatrists the anti-psychiatrists argued that paranoid psychosis could not be systematically interpreted as an unproblematic symptom of mal-adaptation to, or loss of contact with, a transparent reality. Rather, this blunt approach to the schizophrenic merely highlighted the theoretically opaque despotism of

²¹ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Book of Pleasures* (London: Pending Press, 1983), p. 16.

²² Laing and Cooper's work must be read within the rise of a British counter-culture and the emergence of the new-left intellectual sub-culture of a CND intelligentsia which had been evolving throughout the 1950's and exploded in the 1960s. Within a wider European intellectual tradition, one must point out the influence of French existentialism, notably Jean Paul Sartre, on the anti-psychiatry of Laing, and its project of furthering the cause of individual freedom. During the sixties Laing was an icon of radical popular leftist culture and his books bought and read by thousands. *The Divided Self* and *Self and Others* sold up to a million copies each. *The Politics of Experience* became a 'campus classic'. Laing wrote articles for *New Left Review*, *Peace News*, *Psychedelic Review* and attended the 'First International Congress of Social Psychiatry'. Laing was also involved with the radical writers and artist group 'sigma'. In *The Life and Times of R.D. Laing* the narrator explains how at the height of his popularity in the late 60s his lecture tours were 'more popular than Rolling Stones concerts' and that his work was inextricably woven within the fabric of the 60s 'pop culture'. Books were 'smash hits' topping the 'intellectual charts'. His son claims that, at the height of his success, he was 'more difficult' to get hold of than Mick Jagger'. Like The Rolling Stones singer, Laing was often depicted as a 'rock star', photographed in various contemporary poses or roles: yoga positions, shirt removed (mirroring The Doors' Jim Morrison). Indeed lectures echoed pop concerts, with Laing waiting back stage, before emerging dressed from head to foot in fashionable existential 'left bank' black clothing. Cited in the video *The Life and Times of R.D. Laing*, Directed by Eleanor Yule.

²³ Edgar Z Friedenberg, *Laing* (London: Fontana Collins, 1975), p. 18.

psychiatry which prescribes a fixed and immutable idea of what it is to be human, which the psychotic can never measure up to. Indeed, evidently informing the spirit of the times, Laing and Cooper put the alternative case that it was the psychiatrist, and wider authoritarian establishment figures, who were often insane. Far from being unsound, the schizophrenic was idealised as more human, existentially authentic, with privileged access to mystical insights not found in everyday culture. In *The Divided Self* (1960), Laing wrote:

In my opinion, there are...people who are regarded as sane, whose minds are as radically unsound, who may be equally or more dangerous to themselves and others and whom society does not regard as psychotic and fit persons to be in a madhouse...and that the cracked mind of the schizophrenic may *let in* light which does not enter the intact minds of many sane people whose minds are closed.²⁴

Laing's claim is rather surprising for, in broad terms, the schizophrenic appears, psychologically, to be situated in a place far from any widely accepted model of reality. Experiencing themselves as mentally disturbed they commonly articulated to Laing that they felt themselves to be false or divided from a true self. In living life as ab-normal or un-embodied the schizophrenic longed for normal embodiment.²⁵ The embodied person has a sense of their material reality and experiences a healthy relationship to the affective demands of the body, most significantly bodily desire.²⁶ In contrast, the unembodied self is a censorial controlling mind cleft from a desiring body, a naturally 'wild body' of healthy 'desiring machines'.²⁷ Separated from his/her affective sensual self the schizophrenic lives only mentally. The significance of this apparently paradoxical dichotomy is that the unembodied schizophrenic, unlike the unaware oedipalised subject, had become *conscious* of this situation and could articulate this to the psychiatrist.

The schizophrenic's psychological self-awareness suggested to Laing and Cooper that the schizoid person could therefore not be dismissed by society as a disquieting indicator of an untreatable organic madness but must be understood as symptomatic of a wider existential protest against modern

²⁴ Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 27.

²⁵ Laing, *Divided Self*, See Chapter 4 'The Embodied and Unembodied Self', pp. 65 - 77.

²⁶ Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 67.

²⁷ Laing, *Divided Self*, p.66-69. For an expansion on 'Desiring machines' see Perez, *On An[Archy] and Schizoanalysis* and Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti -Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1997).

civilised everyday life. This was the schizoid's key insight: the schizophrenic personality signified that, in hyper-rationalised western societies, the mind had become separated from a natural desiring body. For instance their own patients would complain of feeling petrified, frozen, immovable, carved out of stone or feeling robotic, their minds programmed to perform independent of a natural biological self. From such metaphorical insights Laing and Cooper concluded that society *per se* was biologically disenfranchised, unembodied, frozen, and mechanical, the self a mere transitory performance operating without desire. Therefore, everyone, to a degree, was schizophrenic. The schizoid feeling of unreality was simply an expression of what it was to *be* unreal, living divided from instinctual desire. If May'68 graffiti spelled out the revered counter-cultural maxim "I Take My Desires For Reality Because I Believe In The Reality Of My Desires" it was the schizophrenic who supported this insight.²⁸

Like other anti-oedipal thinkers Laing pointed out that our normal adjusted state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of true potentialities. To feel unreal, divided or alien, hear voices even (the internalised voices of the Other), is to an extent paradoxically *natural*. Schizophrenics found themselves incarcerated in mental hospitals because they failed to repress natural instincts which did not adhere to the unnameable expectations of everyday rational society. The function of psychiatric hospitals, Laing and Cooper believed, was to destroy the patient's ungovernable anarchic identity, remoulding it through drugs, therapy, or ECT, into a form of humanness which conformed to dominant images of reality.²⁹ And, because orthodox psychiatry comprehensively set out to control and repress idiosyncratic human behaviour and language, Cooper and Laing dubbed the asylum a 'total institution'. As a counter-balance to these inhuman practices they formed the Anti-Psychiatric movement.³⁰

To return to my premise that coherent structural homologies characterised the post-'68 political landscape, as we have seen, Laing and Cooper's professional rebellion against scientific peers was indicative of the wider cultural revolt of the counter-culture against what they, and other radical

²⁸ See René Viénet, *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* (New York: Autonomedia/Rebel Press, 1992), p.52.

²⁹ See Richard D Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), Chapter 30 'Psychopathology', pp. 929-960. Gross points out that soviet political dissidents who were diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia, and so categorised as mad or psychotic, could have their objections to the prevailing politico-social situation annulled and thus bypassed as the delusional beliefs of an objectively and scientifically categorised insane entity.

³⁰ Gross, *Psychology*, p. 951.

thinkers, believed to be the unchallenged rational scientific extremism of Western society.³¹ In many other fields of culture, politics, and aesthetics, the younger generation refused to identify with the fixed ideas and ideologies of the cultural paternal order which universalised everything from how one should cut one's hair, to clothing, music, work, and, ultimately, how one should or should not think. The work of Laing and Cooper supported this wider youth revolt because their anti-psychiatry manoeuvred to liberate the real mad, and set free sanitised oedipal society *per se*. By homology, everyone had to be liberated to express their disgust at a repressive outmoded oedipalising society they personally rejected. To achieve this natural polymorphous freedom the anti-psychiatrists argued it was necessary to instigate a period of wilful and self-determined orphanisation.³²

Cooper wrote in *The Death of the Family* that if one does not discover one's own autonomy during the first years of life or in later childhood, 'one is either driven mad in late adolescence, or one gives up the ghost and becomes a normal citizen'.³³ Cooper's gist, was to say that, to achieve autonomy, one must go it alone, to become what influential Nietzschean texts call 'self-propelled wheels' or 'nomads'.³⁴ Cooper did not advocate 'we don't need mother and father any more', he merely maintained 'we only need mothering and fathering'.³⁵

³¹ Describing this emergent phenomenon of a youthful opposition to the technocratic and scientific society Roszak reflects that 'what the counter-culture offers us [anti-psychiatry being a perfect model/paradigm of this new anti-oedipal culture] is a remarkable defection from the long-standing tradition of sceptical, secular intellectuality which has served as the prime vehicle for three hundred years of scientific and technical work in the West.' See Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society & Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.141.

³² In 1972 the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari published their influential collaborative criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis *L'Anti-Oedipe*. Deleuze and Guattari argued in the anti-oedipal logic of the Situationists and anti-psychiatrists that to oedipalise a human subject is to work towards a return or reconciliation of the psychotic or schizophrenic subject to its destination in the symbolic field of the Other. Yet rather than think of the schizophrenic as inhuman or as psychotic, who must be oedipalised, they proposed that the schizophrenic should, despite his pain, be left alone. Like the Situationists they called for a new 'politics of desire'. They believed that if desire is repressed in society - as it is in the oedipal complex - it is because 'every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society'. See *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 1-50. Chapter 1, 'The Desiring Machines'. Interestingly Keith Reader notes that many commentators speak of the period of student revolts and riots, up to and including 1968, as a metaphorical oedipal killing of public (political) and private (familial) Fathers. The era thus came to be described as the 'Orphan Years'. See Keith Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, New York, 1993), p. 87.

³³ David Cooper, *The Death of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 17.

³⁴ Perez, p. 23. See also Friederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

³⁵ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 29.

As an alternative the anti-psychiatrists, unsurprisingly, called for *anti-families*.³⁶ The main counter to the traditional family would be the commune. Although, in the first instance, communes would be a micro-social organisation, in effect they would grow to be indicative of a macrocosmic social ideal. In these new centres of living polymorphous desire would, to an extent, be allowed, human subjects encouraged to make love with as many types of partners as they wished. Moreover, these communities would integrate those who were considered mad and those thought sane, refuse psychiatric diagnosis, and so blur the distinction between insanity and sanity. No one would be labelled schizophrenic, paranoid, a psychopath, or a sexual pervert, because in these communities there would be only people. In communes, subjects subjected to familial repression would also be encouraged to 'get one's family out of one's head'.³⁷ Specifically, Cooper mentions Laing's model commune, Kingsley Hall in London, fictionalised in *Mary Barnes*, but could have referred to his own 'Villa 21', an experimental unit for young schizophrenics. Mixed communes had a political rationale because Cooper and Laing believed the integration of the 'mad experience' in the wider community represented a positive opportunity to stop victimising a minority, and, by homology, the counter-culture, because they were frightening or different. More importantly, once established, alternative communities afforded the sane time and spatial contact to learn *from* the insane, who were, of course, saner than they were anyway. If these experiments happened on a national scale, alternative communities, they argued could 'become dangerous to the bourgeois state and highly subversive because radically new forms of social life are indicated'.³⁸

Anti-Oedipal Theatre

If political theatre was to also re-condition or de-schizophrenise the spectator, then, the content of the plays it presented would seem to be of significant importance. As cultural artefacts, performances had to prove their political value by indicating radically new forms of individual action and anti-oedipal social arrangements. Equivalent to the accessible texts of anti-psychiatry, writers had to promote an anti-oedipal logic, paradoxically, given the anti-oedipal suspicion of language, through encoding meaning in their overt

³⁶ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 16.

³⁷ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 62.

³⁸ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 27.

'utterances', the discourse of their radical dramatic texts.³⁹ *Mary Barnes* achieved this because the play was as much about the anti-familial commune (the social non-cure cure) as it was about Mary Barnes the schizophrenic. The piece took as its dramatic object the wider counter-cultural movement's struggle to set itself and the broader masses free from the 'social matrix in which they found themselves',⁴⁰ rather than one celebrated figure.⁴¹

The play's first radical gesture, therefore, was to carefully re-create, as far as it was reasonably possible, the atmosphere of the 1968 commune, by bringing the anti-family into the space of the regional theatre space, in this instance the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Studio. This importation of the commune within the theatre was significant because, like all oedipal familial structures, bourgeois theatre is residually an exclusive elite organisation, an institution that permits within its walls only human subjects deemed acceptable to it, those who observed the very same unspoken societal laws of normality and reflected values we see in familial or social oedipalisation. As a bourgeois institution orthodox theatre also reproduces the dominant codes of behaviour and decency which, offered upon its stage, reflect back to the audience its own acceptance, and identification with, the mores of socialisation and the perpetuation of the oedipal cycle. Put more simply, bourgeois theatre, as a Cooperian total institution, operated as - and still is - a repressive state instrument in reproducing socially oedipalised subjects. Contrary to this law the *Mary Barnes* play, reflecting Laing's trip to the Albert Hall, re-introduced those excluded from oedipalised society and culture. Mary, Lawrence, and Suzy were all schizophrenics, merely representations of real patients, for sure, yet still schizophrenics retaking their place within the cultural domain of drama. It is a small point, but Edgar's drama, crudely or not, attempted a show of solidarity with those classified as mad or insane.

³⁹ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 9.

⁴⁰ David Edgar, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 1994), Intro.

⁴¹ By 1978, when the *Mary Barnes* story was first performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Studio, many of the alternative communes, fuelled by the philosophical ideals I have outlined, had collapsed. Contrary to anti-psychiatric theory, by the early nineteen seventies orthodox psychiatry began to re-assert its conviction that schizophrenia was, generally, an organic, not socio-political, condition; hence the play began with a scene from the empty commune. Yet, as Edgar argued, by living amongst 'a group of people who believed fiercely in a particular view of the nature of madness, and who attempted to live that belief in a particularly intense and passionate way', Mary Barnes recovered without the help of drugs or electric shocks. Consequently, I would argue, we can reconfigure *Mary Barnes* as an obstinate example - or open political question - about the continuing liberating potential of anti-oedipal living. Edgar, *Plays*, 'Author's Note' p. 91. & David Edgar 'Towards a Theatre of Dynamic Ambiguities', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 33 (1979), 3-23 (p. 9.)

The above, of course, can be dismissed as belonging to the role of mere appearance, a politically correct nod to the times and fashionable aesthetics. This would be a mistake. In truth the *Mary Barnes* drama provided a template or road map for anti-oedipal living and existential recovery. The play, for instance, informed the spectator that 'in feudal times, there were no mad, or sane, defined as such' and so alerted spectators to the fact that in this play madness was to be analysed as a culturally specific historical category, not a universal pathology (*Mary Barnes* Act 1/8). *Mary Barnes* also explained that any journey through madness may only begin after a 'liberated zone', the commune Cooper idealised, has been established. Consequently, the play begins with the arrival of the anti-psychiatrists who institute the radical rules necessary to engineer an anti-oedipal lifestyle, 'we must avoid hierarchies, chains of authority, unspoken rules' (*Mary Barnes* Act 1/2). Next, Mary, the person, not the schizophrenic, appears. Exercising the existential autonomy the new community allowed, it is she, not the doctors, who knows that to get well she must firstly reject her predominantly oedipal/cultural gendered role (she is a nurse) and states 'I've come to have a breakdown' (*Mary Barnes* Act 1/2). The following phase of the play indicated that a non-oedipalising family must replace the subject's oedipalising internalised family. In *Mary Barnes* the character Eddie (Joseph Berke in real life, the main carer for *Mary Barnes*) arrives, to fulfil this role. Mary, an indicator of the wider social subject, then gets re-born.⁴² Returning to a foetal state she embarks upon on a non-oedipalising journey. After a period of re-birth she is fed/suckled by her non-oedipal anti-authoritarian non-gendered mother/father, Eddie. The child (Mary) and adult (Eddie) are shown at play, foregrounding the importance of fantasy, creativity and childhood experiences in natural development. In the next significant episode the adult-child Mary is told that anger and aggression is normal, it is innately natural to attack or challenge figures of authority.⁴³ Eventually Mary establishes personal embodiment. 'This is my body. This is my blood. This is *Mary Barnes*'

⁴² Cooper, in *Death of the Family*, tells how in writing this book 'against the family', 'I went through a profound spiritual and bodily crisis that amounted to the death and rebirth experience of renewal I speak of in these pages' see end 'Dedication'.

⁴³ Roszak outlines how the counter-cultural generation of the 1960s - particularly the theatre writers I am addressing here - adopted and adapted the philosophies and techniques of Gestalt therapy as an antithetical ideology to traditional leftist political dogmas because it refused the 'external' importance of class conflict. Gestalt fitted better within an anti-oedipal utopian logic because 'of the dignity it confers on the predatory aspects of human nature. While traditional psychiatry confronts aggressiveness with suspicion or resistance... Gestalt readily embraces it in its natural manifestations and seeks to give it freedom... the object is not too defuse the submerged charge of aggression but to detonate it... in this way, the aggressiveness - bred of frustration, resentment, justified anger, hatred - that had been stored away in this or that dark corner of the organism has the chance to enjoy release.' p.193

(*Mary Barnes* Act 1/10). Having achieved autonomous selfhood, the adult/child receives crayons from Eddie, the tools needed to develop her natural potential creativity. Finally, Mary becomes a prolific artist and exhibits her work.

Mary Barnes conclusion, then, tidily asserted Cooper's Situationist - flavoured assertion that every child, before family indoctrination passes a certain point, is a potential artist, visionary, or revolutionary. The play, though, as I state, was not exclusively about the recovery of the individual schizophrenic. *Mary Barnes* was a play about the radical potential of anti-familial anti-oedipal communities to liberate society and instigate *cultural* re-birth. To communicate this message the drama presented the audience with joyful and chaotic images of childish adult playfulness realisable only within anti-oedipal communities. Rather than work, the ultimate role destination of oedipalised modern subjects, in *Mary Barnes* adult characters, read, write poetry, paint with paint, paint with shit, speak in incomprehensible syntax, play records, drink alcohol to excess, smoke Marijuana, refer to LSD, recount dreams, and embrace Eastern mysticism. Doctors hit the schizophrenics, the schizophrenics hit the doctors, cigarettes are eaten as food and people demand to be fed through tubes in the stomach, the community embraces the incomprehensible literature of the beat poets, and, by inference, evokes their subscription to the a-moral teachings of an anything-goes 'it is forbidden to forbid' lifestyle.⁴⁴

Brenton's *Christie in Love* correspondingly refused to provide a monochromatic account of normality/abnormality, sanity/insanity, good/evil. Although the audience was shown Christie masturbating whilst blowing into a rubber hose down the flies of his trousers, and told that he cut pubic hair from women which he kept in a small tin, Brenton showed Christie not to be a monster; when he takes off his paper horror mask 'what's left is a feeble, ordinary man blinking through his pebble glasses'.⁴⁵ The anti-oedipal logic underpinning this example is that Brenton selected Christie to indicate to the audience the arbitrariness of other social and sexual frames of behaviour considered mad or perverse. Although a serial murderer, Christie's un-coded sexual behaviour, without reference to normal sexual acts, is ultimately harmless. Christie represented an idiosyncratic image of a particular sign of bodily desire, a piece of autoeroticism, say. Borrowing heavily from the tenets

⁴⁴ Roszak, p. 135.

⁴⁵ Howard Brenton, *Brenton: Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1986), Author's Production Note, p. 2.

of anti-psychiatry, *Christie in Love* radically suggested that Christie's behaviour, like that of the schizophrenic, was not disturbing to him, only the alienated and sanitised subject of identification, in particular the oedipalised spectator. This was perhaps the overt ideological meaning of *Christie in Love* and the other productions I analyse here: perversity is socially and culturally specific, not universal.

Anti-Oedipal Form

The contention that *Mary Barnes*, *Christie in Love*, *Gum and Goo*, *The Education of Skinny Spew*, and *Pignight* and *Blowjob*, contained ideological meaning, is somewhat problematic, however. Anti-oedipalists, if not entirely dismissive of content or meaning, were at the very least wary, and weary, of the dangers of a predominantly *linguistic* model of signification. Reflecting this, anti-oedipal theatre sought to indicate its qualified non-meaning meanings in an anti-oedipal - non-linguistic - way by adopting a schizoid or psychotic attitude to its own aesthetic *form*. For example in Edgar's piece, the audience repeatedly heard popular music played not from beginning to end, but through obsessively replayed intros. This had resonance because oedipalisation is, after all, like being stuck in the groove of a record, the subject forced to follow along a singular track or path with a prescriptive beginning and ordered endgame. Suitably, therefore, in *Mary Barnes*, musicality was made purposely discordant; played too loud, it was 'out of tune' and, like the schizophrenic, refused harmonic ordering. Indeed unlike normal or normalising narratives, of which *Oedipus Rex* is the obvious paradigm, the audience never heard a played record from beginning to end, just short intense unresolved bursts as the needle was lifted out of the groove. Refusing to adopt the chosen communicative codes of rational psychology to articulate their own radical anti-psychiatric meanings, children's nursery rhymes were recited to convey that, like the garden in 'Mary Mary quite contrary', the schizophrenic's progress may be slow, too. In other sections poetry was intertwined with 'naturalistic dialogue', indicating, like Laing and Cooper's own work, the validity of the juxtaposition of orthodox and alternative forms of expression.

Ultimately, what these diverse dramatic expressions demonstrate, is that political theatre, like the schizophrenic, was prepared to orphan itself - homologically - from the received laws of normal theatrical or dramatic law. We can say it refused to conform to a universal model of what a performance

should be, resembling the refusal to conform to a universal rational mind, and so consciously loosened its own *identity* with traditional or orthodox drama. For example, in an attempt to subvert the despotic authority of language as a form of theatrical and social signification, in *Mary Barnes* dialogue was often non-sensical or non-sequential, absurd and surreal. Words were reduced to indecipherable sounds, physical manifestations of a voice box, not an abstract cognitive subject. In addition the written text existed alongside a non-verbal counterpoint. When the importance of existential autonomy was raised Mary narrated her own biography in a non-ordered and sometimes non-literal form of communication, using poetic language, paintings, or religious and mystical allegories to express, or, not express, a recognisable inner reality. Scenes were also erratic in length and, apart from a certain chronology, the well appointed process of Mary's cure/recovery regime was randomly juxtaposed as in dreams, nightmares, or free association. Physicality was also put to the fore. The play featured abject scenes of characters spitting at each other, fighting, and violently destroying props, whilst blood, food, and excrement are smeared upon walls and selves.

A different way of theorising *Mary Barnes's* liberation of previously captivated or unacceptable dramatic signs is to reconfigure the play as exhibiting a wilful demonstration of Edgar's own *aesthetic madness*, rather than the cultural madness of those who inhabited the commune. Edgar the dramatist/artist embraced chaotic signification in a determined exhibition of artistic and dramatic disorder. Disorder had to become an essential component of any serious and authentic anti-oedipal theatre, because anti-oedipalist thinkers referred to disorder as a positive alternative state. Like a chemical experiment or the social alchemy one finds in an idealised revolutionary situation, everything had to be in flux. Moreover, writing and consciously ordered art reveals intention. To write to be understood demands that you the addressor must form grammatically correct sentences to the addressee. Structure and ordered narrative are therefore essential for ideological transmission. By contrast - and homology - a subversive anti-oedipal aesthetic demanded a writing or art forms where structure was radically dismissed, freed from the tyranny of consciousness and ideology. It celebrated the 'end of order'. In *The Revolution of Everyday Life* Vaneigem, to offer a comparison, demanded that the semantic realm become a new site of revolutionary conflict by refusing the old order of language or words which demand submission to its abstract laws and binary logic. As an antidote he evoked the spirit of surrealism. For

Vaneigem Surrealism was revolutionary because it displayed the 'baroque current [that] runs through the history of thought, making fun of words and signs with the subversive intention of disturbing the semiological order and Order in general'.⁴⁶

Surrealism is also useful here because the baroque current Vaneigem describes complies to an aesthetic mindset contemporary anti-oedipalists categorise as *rhizomatic*.⁴⁷ The rhizome or rhizomatica is an attractive metaphor because its development and growth, like sexuality, desire, and the schizoid mind is chaotic, unpredictable. Its form, because it grows without repressive human cultivation and intervention, is unrestricted, twisted, tangled, anarchic, perhaps abnormal in appearance, but paradoxically *natural*. It goes where it wants. Consequently we can say that political theatre anti-oedipal aesthetics were rhizomatic because like the unstructured tangled tuber, the new aesthetic went where it wanted. For just as adherence to one genre or form of theatre is, in a way, a sort of comparable sexual faithfulness, indicating an ascetic closed mindset, (anti-oedipal theatre consummated with various artistic partners) it displayed a polymorphous perversity - an aesthetic of anything goes - in its selection of genres. Homological to Vaneigem's free roaming Surrealism or the avant-garde rhizome, perverse anarchic playwrights grabbed hold of any form of expression they fancied. Herbert Marcuse makes a particularly useful homological link between polymorphous desire and promiscuous aesthetics in *Eros and Civilisation* (1956). In this book he rightly connected the abundance and satisfaction of sexual desire, the order of 'sensuousness', with a liberated aesthetics. Marcuse observed, identical to sexual activity, 'Art challenges the prevailing principle of reason: in representing the order of sensuousness...it invokes a tabooed logic - the logic of gratification as against that of repression'.⁴⁸

Conversely, this aesthetically abundant and culturally promiscuous theatre also looked to be non-repressive and erotically courageous in the themes and erotic imagery it presented for consummation. That is to say, like the rhizome, anti-oedipal theatre went where it wanted to grow, but in ways other than in its chaotic art formations. Without recourse to cultural morals, accepted taboos or laws which, like the rails or groove the oedipalised run

⁴⁶ Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life*, p.104.

⁴⁷ See Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, for a fuller discussion on the theory of the rhizome.

⁴⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Enquiry into Freud* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), pp.185.

upon, and kept the serious and respectable pre-'68 dramatist upon an acceptable track, post-'68 dramatists went off the track.

When we see Brenton, for instance, apparently revelling in his own embracement of Christie's twisted desire, like the spectator whose attendance paralleled the consumption of the wider counter culture's shock aesthetics, the playwright advertised his own refusal to adapt to social and cultural sexual morality *per se*. *Christie in Love* was simply a case study of Brenton's own confession of concomitant madness, exhibited in a homological perverse art which unashamedly exhibited his own primal imagination. The audience observed, not Christie's madness, but Brenton's own perversity. This was no longer a show of philosophical solidarity but the playwright dissolving the sane/insane dichotomy; Christie might have committed the crime, but it was Brenton who put the overtly sexual play on. Emanating from within a comparable personal perversity, *Blowjob* and *Pignight*, as well as the later *Vampire* (1973), presented Snoo Wilson's personal and aesthetic obsession with the dark material of existence. *Blowjob* featured a mutilated torso given oral sex by the schizophrenic Moira, whilst in the background a man's brains ooze from underneath a dirty cloth. In *Vampire*, a father rapes his own daughter, ejaculating at the moment he is shot in the back, whilst later in the play, a women undresses and has sex with a corpse. In *Pignight* a half-man-half-pig rapes the male schizophrenic, Hans. In these plays, then, the paying theatre-goer no longer had to recognise fictional human desiring machines 'breaking down, starting over, coughing, shitting, fucking, pissing,'⁴⁹ but spot the desiring machine offered as playwright, the writer's own bodily obsession with the *materia prima* displayed and bared upon the stage for all to see.

A more obvious logic for the inclusion of these physical primal images is that, oedipal forms operate and appeal to the rational mind. The rational mind within Eurocentric fields of understanding is held above, and opposed to, the irrationality of the body and senses, which are primordial or bestial. Anti-oedipal theatre, though, eschews the mind as the only candidate of knowledge, it embraces the sensual micro-politics of desire. Hence, Christie, Moira, and Hans are anti-heroes to the avant-garde because they are not slaves to reason but affective desire. This leads again, therefore, to the question of finding a new more appropriately unified aesthetic. For if anti-oedipal theatre idealises the body over the mind, or at least wishes to redress the imbalance in Western

⁴⁹ Perez, p. 59.

civilising cultural practice, it follows that it must promote not only an 'embodied' theatre, or society, through its content or abstract images but through and within its concrete *affective* form.

Artaud for Artaud's Sake

Anti-oedipal theatre found the theoretical sustenance it needed in the work of the French surrealist and dramatist, Antonin Artaud. The surreal aesthetics of *Come Together*, for instance, can be traced back to Peter Brook's 1964 'Theatre of Cruelty Season' which instigated a rereading of the theories of Artaud. Artaud's vision dovetailed well with post-'68 anti-oedipal theatre writers because his anti-authoritarian brand of dramaturgy supported their own desire to fill the stage with a 'mood of slaughter, torture, and bloodshed'.⁵⁰ Moreover, Artaud - one of the few artists lionised by the anti-star Situationists - alarmed both the aesthetic and political establishment. The theatre critic Michael Billington, for one, suggested that the return to Artaud had been to the detriment of other dramatic forms. New experimental theatre, he argued, 'is too little concerned with what is happening outside the theatre, it is cut off from any political or social source, that a lot of it in fact is Artaud for Artaud's Sake'.⁵¹ For Billington anti-oedipal drama - underground theatre - had turned *a-political*. The critic's accusation did have an element of truth in it. *Christie in Love*, made only oblique references to class and none to politics, it represented untrammelled human desire, necrophilia, not Trotskyite theory. *AC/DC* featured young adults whose central focus was group sex, not revolutionary Marxist politics. *The Education of Skinny Spew* was an allegory of what Althusser describes as the forced march to adulthood in the oedipal complex. *Skinny* points out that humans are oppressed/repressed not by the demands of capitalist means of production but by familial and culturally oedipalising others. The schizophrenic in *Gum and Goo* does not seek to murder political figures but her own parents. *Mary Barnes* discusses politics, for sure, but perhaps only to illuminate that for the anti-psychiatrists it is the family, not the economic sphere, which is generally the true site of political struggle. In Wilson's *Blowjob* the only recognisable allusion to class is that the play is set, in part, in a working-men's club. Working men or women only make an appearance through the mediation of the two proletarian skinheads brutally murdering a rich homosexual, far from

⁵⁰ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double* (New York: Calder, 1989), p. 21.

⁵¹ Michael Billington, 'London Avant Garde: Who, What, Where', *Plays and Players*, Vol 17, No 9, (1970), pp. 20-21. (p. 21)

typifying a bourgeois industrial capitalist, however, the victim had invented cat's eyes. *Vampire* dealt with sexual oppression and the rise of the Women's Movement; Freud and Jung appear on stage, but not Marx or Lenin.

Billington was simply missing the political point. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty was the perfect vehicle for this new anti-oedipal theatre, *because* of its a-political politics. In fact, from a Situationist perspective - Vaneigem maintained that identity cannot be found by adopting political positions - anti-oedipal theatre's a-political stance makes perfect theoretical sense. Following a socialist political ideology or Marxist party was just another example of the modern identity losing itself in pre-existent social and cultural paternal roles which beg identification, but which are all ultimately oedipal, pathological. Post-'68, then, anti-oedipalists became disillusioned with traditional socialist politics - and traditional socialist realism (perhaps) - as the means to instigate a democratic society. Instead they substituted it with an alternative democracy, a movement for social equality, one which promoted a radical subjectivity founded upon the *materia prima* of desire Vaneigem outlined. This change in political focus is a crucial point for, as the Oz trial - and Billington's complaint - illustrate:

The State and other oppressive institutions are not threatened by Marxists, fanatics, etc., but by people who refuse to conform to any hier(archy) whatsoever. The most politically threatening act against the State and other established orders is the act that refuses to set up another hier(archical) framework, the act that refuses to let itself be *coded*.⁵²

Henceforth, the new political-theatre of desire began to promote the physical form over the politically intellectual; a significant thematic switch which explains the prevalence of themes of death, sexuality, corporeality, and polymorphous perversion which pervaded the emergent underground political dramas. Anti-oedipal political theatre could also claim to be *more* democratic, 'socialist' even, than intellectual political theatre because all humans possess instinct or a body, even if they are not educated sufficiently to grapple with complex political theory. Desire, therefore, promised a revolutionary equality of access to the

⁵² Perez, p. 117-118. Perez uses the term "An(archy)" to distinguish the personal politics of the 'desiring machine' from orthodox political or economic anarchism.

theatrical event. Socialist drama sought to be political only in the sense that it was *apolitical*, anti-oedipal.

In a fitting piece of thinking-in-common Artaud argued that western society identified itself with the intellect and the written word over and above the somatic experience. Consequently Artaud demanded that theatre must say *au revoir* to the text because 'our innermost feelings are untranslatable and linguistically inexpressible'.⁵³ The Artaudian inspired anti-oedipal theatre's project, therefore, came to reinstate the body as a site of meaning and revolutionary knowledge because, as Vic Seidler says:

Modernity has largely been organised around a particular vision of the rational self who is able to guide his life through reason alone [...] This is a Eurocentric vision. For it is Europe that has appropriated science and progress to itself that allowed it to define both 'civilisation' and 'modernity' in its own terms. It established a sense of the human being as a rational self defined in fundamental opposition to its inner nature.⁵⁴

Seidler's observation is particularly useful here because, as Laing noted, in the negative sense of the schizophrenic condition, subjects live only, or predominantly, mentally. The mind acts as a means of oedipal control, policing the irrational subversive body. Anti-oedipal theatre, therefore, sought to contact the fundamental human resources and instinctual drives submerged in the modern rational subject. Here we can see how anti-oedipal theatre threatened the bourgeois state because, homologous to Cooper's anti-institution, this theatre consistently indicated to the spectator radically new forms of social life, a community living for the body, not the mind. The potency of anti-oedipal theatre, then, lay in the fact that it impelled the audience to recognise themselves as the desiring machines they were.

The most obvious examples of socially affective forms are pornography and horror. Duly, in *Christie In Love Brenton*, like his peer Wilson, played with both genres. In doing so he implicated the spectator's affective response to the deviance witnessed in the play. For example, the Inspector directs the audience to the importance of 'having a bash at controlling yourself'. If the Christie story made them feel disgusted, they were given permission to vomit, 'if you want to

⁵³ Perez, p.42.

⁵⁴ Victor Seidler, *Unreasonable Men* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 45. Notably Artaud took much of his inspiration from Eastern, not Western, theatre and philosophy.

spew spew' (*Christie in Love*, Scene 9). Conversely *Christie In Love* acknowledged that the spectator may, like the Inspector, actually be 'having their own fancy tickled'...because 'we are human'. At one stage the Constable parades the doll around to the audience.

Constable: Just a scrubber. Twenty-six. Tits a bit worn. The rest of her, a bit worn. A very ordinary bint. I wouldn't have minded a go. I mean, if she weren't a rotting corpse I'd have, perhaps, chanced my arm.
(*Christie in Love*, Scene 9)

The significance of this scene is that Brenton sought to push the rationalising spectator towards an unwanted and disconcerting affective response to an abnormal pornographic image. Because, unlike orthodox theatre, the performance looked to deny the spectator a comfortable form with which she/he could *identify*. Art forms can quite easily perform the function of identification if they support the subject's view of themselves. Rational subjects attend rational intellectual culture, rather than watching pornography or horror, to confirm that they *are* rational intelligent thinking subjects. Audiences see themselves *reflected* within the aesthetic forms they embrace. In *Christie In Love*, though, spectators were confronted with a pornographic form, an art form that satiates the materiality of bodily desire. Comparable shock tactics are evident in Wilson's work. When in *Vampire* the playwright showed a father perform incestuous sex, or filled the theatre space with the audible moans and cries of a young woman copulating, the move was designed to bypass the censorial oedipalised mind and create a more physical, indeed erotic, reaction. It was in this manner that, following Artaud, post-'68 plays and playwrights sought to reinstate sexual desire, even perversity, back within the field of drama.

This new aesthetic situation was, of course, ultimately threatening because, although the body's sexual responses can be controlled, the insistent force of these repressed reactions, as Artaud believed, communicated, like the schizophrenic, an independent knowledge to the audience member: I am divided from my instinctual self. If Oedipus as a tragedy has as its political and cultural function to warn of untrammelled desire, and instructs the theatregoer of the necessity of a certain un-embodiment, post-'68 theatre promoted embodiment and sought to release this repressed libido to positive revolutionary or destructive ends. Consequently we can speak of anti-oedipal

plays as *affective*. Affective productions celebrated the sensual and physical body, not the rational mind. Simultaneously, paralleling the anti-institutions of Laing and Cooper the theatre sought to become an *anti-institution*. Unlike the National Theatre, or other institutes which peddle classical drama, adopted for its enduring universal qualities - reflecting the ideal state of the civilised human condition - and the State which reflects this - anti-oedipal drama refused to accept Oedipus as any kind of universal referent or knowledge. *Oedipus Rex*, 'a nice little play' was reduced to the realms of fiction.⁵⁵

The Anti-Oedipal Anti-Oedipalist.

So far I have mostly written about the aesthetic assault on the oedipal spectator. But, by implication, anti-oedipal spectators, by identifying with an anti-oedipal theatre, left themselves open to the charge that, paradoxically, they were performing an act of wilful identification with an alternative figure and aesthetic which supports an assimilated identity, in this case the anti-oedipus subject. As I noted above the avant-garde cognoscenti were embedded in a milieu fixated with schizophrenia and its attendant theory, so much so that left-wing intellectuals would 'hang out' on the wards of David Cooper's schizophrenic research clinic in North London.⁵⁶ Any rigorous anti-oedipal theatre, therefore, had to break or subvert this alternative identification with the same commitment it demolished oedipal ones.

Brenton achieved such a subversion via a rather circular route. Instead of attacking the spectator's identification with the schizophrenic persona, he prepared an offensive which undermined the spectator's identification with fashionable schizoid aesthetics, as well as their central philosophical ideas. In particular he attacked surrealism.⁵⁷ Initially Brenton's art appears to identify with the aesthetics of surrealism. In one segment a tape played whilst Christie

⁵⁵ Perez, p. 110.

⁵⁶ R. Boyers & R. Orrill, eds, *Laing and Anti-Psychiatry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.

35.

⁵⁷ Brenton's assault on surrealism followed an established, and coherent, anti-oedipal tradition. Vaneigem, for instance, although at times appearing a keen fan, dismissed much surrealism; Dali's, that is, not Artaud's. Surrealism, he said, was plainly an *appropriation* of madness by the bourgeois artist. Dali and other surrealists, would, like the anti-psychiatrists or British underground, mine delusional states, 'co-opt' clinically mad attitudes for artistic purposes, and defended the irrational knowledge of those declared pathologically insane by rational science. In particular surrealists trawled the world of dreams psychoanalysis had unearthed and so interpret it for 'hidden meanings'. The problem was that, although surrealism promised to promote new ways of looking at the self, and endeavoured like the underground avant-garde theatre to 'test the shock effect of representations of erection, masturbation or defecation', many of its interpretative strategies were dogmatic - oedipal. JF, Dupuis, (Raoul Vaneigem), *A Cavalier History Of Surrealism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999), p. 60-62.

masturbated. Comparable to the voices in a schizophrenic mind, the recording described in a painterly manner, reminiscent of the work of Salvador Dali, a surreal interpretation of Christie's necrophilia.

Women...the streets are full of them. In their nasty skirts...And their shoes like metal rats, clip clip on the pavement...and their beady eyes sweeping the area like birds of prey...They're on the look out! Women out at night for men. Scissors in their handbags to cut you off. Slice you where you're private. Each tit a nail to make you bleed. Each mouth a mousetrap...And each cunt a bacon slicer whittling manhood away. A woman's body that's a machine for death. (*Christie in Love*, Scene 3)

The imagery here clearly borrows heavily from other surrealist forms, particularly automatic writing techniques and the recounting of dreams. Castration, as with surrealism, is the dominant theme. Breton consequently offered an explanation of Christie's behaviour through a recognisable form, surrealism, which identified itself with the discourse of psychoanalysis. This is not unanticipated, for in the period Breton was writing, psychoanalysis, like anti-psychiatry, had become a new religion for much of the counter-cultural left.⁵⁸ The polymorphous structure of the analysand's recounting of his/her experience was, like the schizophrenic's ramblings, thought to reveal essential truths. Hence the spectator was tempted into decoding the passage within the surrealist logic of psychoanalysis, with its insistence on the primacy of the castration complex, to elucidate meaning. Rather than building a political discourse of its own, as anti-oedipalism demands, surrealism relied heavily on psychoanalytic discourse to support the authenticity of images presented in the art it wanted to sell. Everything had to be a displacement or condensation of desires explainable by psychoanalytic interpretation. Andre Breton, for instance, concluded that anyone who wanted to interpret 'the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table' had only to 'consult a key to the simplest of sexual symbols...the umbrella here can stand only for a man, the sewing machine only for a woman...and the dissecting table for a bed'

59

⁵⁸ Keith Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p.106.

⁵⁹ Dupuis-Vaneigem, p.88.

Indeed, apparently sharing a structure of feeling with the surrealist tradition, Brenton's dreamlike representation of Christie's mad state is striking in its similarity to Breton's psychoanalytic interpretation of the sewing machine and umbrella. Mediated through Christie's overt utterances the playwright sounded as though he *supported* the spectator's intellectual identification with surrealism/psychoanalysis. Thinking homologically the spectator was invited to recognise a socio-cultural community of conviction in which the spectator identifies with the authoritarian surrealist playwright, the surrealist discipline, surreal drama, and a surreal logic *per se*. Brenton's faith in surrealism seems to be borne out further because, like surrealism's use of cut-and-paste bricolage, *Christie in Love* appears to be purposefully ornate, dis-ordered, rhizomatic, careful to conform to surrealist aesthetics. Brenton specifically stated that play should be a 'kind of dislocation, tearing one style up for another.'⁶⁰ He spliced naturalism with Brechtian theatre, popular-comic horror, pornography, and avant-garde expressionism.

But if spectators identified themselves with Brenton's own identification with surrealist 'rhizomatic' form, this necessitated a headlong fall into the *anti* anti-oedipalist trap. Because by cutting and pasting different styles and genres together, Brenton undermined the despotic psychoanalytic dogmatism of surrealism by surreptitiously presenting *alternative* aesthetic justifications for Christie's psychological state, paradoxically from within its own prescriptive disordered surreal aesthetic. For example, the recognisable presence of nineteenth-century deterministic naturalism in the performance of Christie suggested, *pace* Ibsen or Strindberg, that it is in his environment, where and how he was raised, that an explanation for his mad behaviour, can be located. By contrast, in using Brechtian reportage (the tape relayed significant socio-economic happenings in the life of Christie - he was gassed in the war, became a special constable, a landlord, as well as economically and socially alienated), the play suggested that his madness - anger - was underpinned by socio-political economic failings. In other sections when the police spoke in a mechanical robotic form, an idiom redolent of German Expressionism, this pressed the spectator to decode the play as an aesthetic concerned, in contradiction to deterministic naturalism, with specifically subjective, sub-social realities, rather than the external world or self.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Brenton, *Brenton: Plays: One*, p. 2.

⁶¹ Counsell, *Signs of Performance*, p. 47.

Although the fan of surrealism could interpret this surfeit of forms as a paradigm of Marcusian abundance, in reality the real import of the promiscuity of codes was that they offered *contradictory* idiomatic political or philosophical explanations of selfhood. Brenton, working within an anti-oedipal logic, accordingly refused to provide a single coherent aesthetic formal interpretative philosophy which could translate Christie's actions; not even a surrealist one. Because anti-oedipal art had to be, by its very own logic, *asignifying*, such that it refused to impose order or categories upon human behavioural patterns, and so be a meaning-making machine. As Brenton has pointed out, *Christie in Love* is 'a play without meaning'⁶²

What is more, structurally comparable to *Mary Barnes*, or the idealised anti-oedipal schizophrenic psyche, *Christie in Love* drifted between forms, demonstrated inconsistency, and exhibited independence from coherent aesthetic schooling. In the anti-oedipal theatre a-signification ultimately signified that the *authentic* anti-oedipal thinker/spectator embrace a multiplicity of positions, reject absolutes, rebel against paradigms of order and truth. Homologous with Cooper's autonomous subject, the reader of the play was left to drift alone in the aloneness of radical subjectivity. Put another way, it was *because* of its diverse content and form, that the play declined to offer the spectator a fixed secure position of supportive identification - particularly identity with the, figuratively speaking, insane/sane playwright.⁶³

Anti-oedipal political theatre, however, went much further in its nomadology than the cultural or philosophical. Its refusal to identify with specific authors, artists, or aesthetic schools of thought, was transposed, homologically, to a rejection of political despotism, be it theoretical or actual. Rather than revere the great men of political ideologies, offering paternal figures with which the spectator could identify, in a continuation of its anti-art stance, anti-oedipal theatre demanded that the radical subject sail without a political compass.⁶⁴ Anti-politics, was particularly prevalent in *Mary Barnes*. Rather than hold fast to an authoritarian anti-authoritarian clinical psychiatry, radical psychologists are

⁶² Roland Rees, *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre*, (London: Oberon Books, 1992), p. 204.

⁶³ In *Christie in Love* the spectator's very identification with anti-oedipalism - his/her fascination with images of perversion and other culturally abject entities at large - was assaulted and tested from the very beginning as props of 'hot semen' were brought upon the stage, the spectator's attention being drawn to its 'smell', and limericks and jokes recount fantastic and surreal tales of sexual abnormality, deformed genitalia, urine, dandruff, and spit.

⁶⁴ Perez, pp.92 - 93. Perez writes 'Forget Marx, Bakunin, Kropotkin and the rest...too many bearded men...these men belong to history, and we've had it with history. Fuck History... We want a [political] nomadology instead. We aim to move, to dance to fly...to take a schizo stroll'.

shown seeking political explanations for human suffering outside the oedipal complex as the doctors attend a fictionalised Dialectics of Liberation conference, euphemistically renamed 'Shrinks for Socialism'.⁶⁵ In scene 8 of Act 1, mirroring *Christie in Love*, the performance aired a heterogeneity of political theories to explain the causes of extant psychological suffering. Borrowing heavily from Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1967) (a book Laing freely made use of), Brenda offers that madness is a category invented by capitalism. Equally it is suggested that, historically, madness was economical, rather than physiological, defined as other because the mentally ill were economically unexploitable. Any comforting theoretical certainty was immediately subverted as Foucauldian theory melded confusingly into contemporary thinking about the society of the spectacle discussed by the Situationists, 'People are defined by their relation to commodities. I own, therefore I am. You are the things you buy' (*Mary Barnes* Act 1/8). To disorientate the audience even more, the play suggested, sexual repression administered through religious doctrine can make healthy sexual children schizophrenic. Beth an intern of the commune states 'My parents were religious. Didn't let stay out late or wear cosmetics...I told them once, I want to go with men. They said I was beside myself. I didn't mean it. It wasn't me' (*Mary Barnes* Act1/8). Following these theoretically chaotic arguments, *Mary Barnes* suggested that the forms of revolutionary action to correct the above must also be multiple and heterogeneous. Zimmerman volunteers the efficacy of a sexual revolution 'The revolution's fucking in the road', but Brenda counteracts this by arguing that 'The revolution is not fucking in the road' and calls for a violent political revolution, whilst Hugo - the Langian anti-psychiatrist - says that any real revolution begins in existential honesty, 'The revolution is...just saying what we mean' (*Mary Barnes* 1-8).

Homologous to the diversity of disordered philosophical aesthetics we see juxtaposed in *Christie in Love*, by contrasting heterogeneous political theory, *Mary Barnes* attempted a comparable subversion of the spectator's oedipal identification with a singular socialist doctrine, particularly, of course, the now discredited Soviet model of revolutionary socialism (see Chapter 2 'Political Theatre and the Occupations Movement'). In fact *Mary Barnes* offered the political spectator no political or correct theoretical line with which to

⁶⁵ As we have seen, the real 'Dialectics of Liberation' conference was non-oedipal in that, eschewing the unwritten laws of revolutionary institutions, it included other forms of political expression with rock groups and open communal forums replacing, or complementing, the wordy didactic arguments of hard-line theorists.

identify. The performance records that the revolutionary anti-psychiatric communal commune, was ultimately rejected by the working class, as communities fell apart amid internal wrangling and theoretical dissonance. The rights of the community were foregone in caring for the well-being of one individual, Mary. *Mary Barnes* showed anti-psychiatrists to be as dishonest and oedipalised as other subjects; the play undermined identification with them, too. Left to drift in the theoretical desert anti-oedipalist thinkers desire, then, audience members had to walk alone, because anti-oedipal political theatre, being theoretically consistent, refused to be a theoretical compass, authoritatively pointing out routes to social and personal emancipation.

Playpower

In light of the above, we can say that post-'68 political theatre refused to be an institution offering and supporting fixed states of being, a drama of despotic signification, a theatre of the perfect cultural coincidence. Moreover, it sought to undermine rigid meanings and refused to endorse prescribed codes of social practice. To attach abstract meaning to Christie's perversity was to perform an act of psychiatric or political diagnosis which, in this theatre, as in the commune, was roundly forbidden. Similarly, to label a play surrealist or expressionistic, socialist, Marxist or Anarchist, came to be as fascistic as labelling a person schizophrenic or perverted. This aesthetic and political nihilism leaves us with a spectrum of plays that, reflecting Christie's meaningless activity, are objects without any intrinsic or fixed meaning. The spectator was therefore confronted with aesthetic form standing alone as *form*, art for art's sake. Anti-oedipal theatre was left with no alternative but to signify its own form as *form*. We can now offer that plays like *Mary Barnes* and *Christie in Love* were plays written for playing's sake, signs of play, the playwright's own playing around *per se*.

Play, arguably, is one of the most enduring aspects of a residual anti-oedipal logic. For if it is part of a child's true pre-oedipal nature to play, and to be estranged from play, as adulthood invariably demands, is to be divided, made schizoid. Play is also pre or non-verbal. In playing, like the rhizome, the infant freely wanders in a haphazard way, schizophrenic but natural, the child freely fantasising about other worlds, a tangled tuber of different non-identical selves. Play is also radically unconcerned with oedipal categories such as

good/evil, normal/abnormal, sane/insane, truth and falsity.⁶⁶ This is why play is essentially attractive to the anti-oedipal mind. Childhood is, like the *Christie in Love* play, a-moral, a-political, and a-signifying. Play is also technically 'poor'. To create its own self-propelling alternative worlds it depends not upon authors, artists or cultural artefacts/commodities, but upon the imagination. We can say that play invents its own stories and fables with or without meanings. This return to the primal imagination has political connotations, too. Like the *materia prima*, although a mental faculty, the capacity to imagine is democratic, accessible to everyone. All human beings dream, can imagine a better life, and, before adulthood, (becoming like mommy and daddy) played as children, creating their own inner worlds free from the tyranny of social and cultural laws.

Furthermore, if post-'68 political theatre rejected the hyper production of industrial societies, promoted simultaneously by the free-market capitalism of the West, and bastardised state capitalism of the Soviet Bloc, play charmed the playwright because, by structural coincidence, it was anti-work. Play produces not commodities but, equivalent to sexual *jouissance*, unrestrained pleasure. Paris graffiti cautioned the radical subject against the toil of the workaday industrial economy when it stated "Never Work". In London followers of the SI connected labour and employment with mental illness. One scrawled piece of philosophy questioned, "Same thing day after day -Tube-Work-Dinner-Work-Tube-Armchair-TV-Sleep-Work. How Much More Can You Take. One in Five Go Mad, One in Ten Cracks Up"⁶⁷ The structural homology radicals made between promiscuous play and pleasurable sexuality can be seen in graffiti sprayed upon the statue of 'Eros' in London's Piccadilly, "Work=Castration: Join The General Strike".⁶⁸ To become a good-worker, then, was thought politically comparable to submitting to the equivalent inauthentic stereotypical roles of the good-child, pupil, student, husband, wife, Mother or Father. Vaneigem sums up modern life as follows:

Take a thirty-five year-old man. Each morning he starts his car, drives to the office, pushes papers, has lunch in town, plays pool, pushes more papers, leaves work, has a couple of drinks, goes home, greets his wife, kisses his children, eats his steak in front of the TV, goes to bed, makes love and falls asleep. Who reduces a man's life to this pathetic series of

⁶⁶ Perez, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Richard Neville, *Playpower* (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 204.

⁶⁸ Neville, p. 206.

clichés...He does it himself, breaking his day down into a series of poses chosen more or less unconsciously from the range of dominant stereotypes.⁶⁹

Vaneigem's interconnection between the worker and broader social oedipalisation holds water because, he or she 'rejects authentic satisfaction' to live out a 'passionless asceticism' caused by his/her identification with the workaday roles offered in the field of the Other.⁷⁰

In stark contrast *Playpower*, Richard Neville's addition to anti-oedipal lifestyle, rhetorically asked - unlike the worker - 'do children holiday from play?'⁷¹ The answer the text solicited, of course, was no. The book argued that through play 'children explore in indiscriminate and anarchistic fashion all the erotic potentialities of the human body'; behaviour which, like the perverse polymorphous sex and cultural artefacts of the underground, was 'narcissistic and guiltless'.⁷² Accordingly underground culture 'identified' with the child by being playful rather than workaday. 'Once upon a time' Neville laments, like childhood, 'culture was fun and games. Then it became earnest, drab, puritan, and anti-play'.⁷³ The goal the underground set itself, therefore, was to return culture to its pre-oedipal form. By homology, within counter-cultural theatre fun and freedom had to replace seriousness and content as a new indicator of depth; in contrast to great works or classics, purposeless play was now to be the mark of the creative.⁷⁴

For instance, *The Education of Skinny Spew* and *Gum and Goo*⁷⁵ were - as in infantile play - technically poor. Props were reduced to the bare essentials. In *Skinny Spew* a single white sheet signified a womb, a bed, and the sea in which actors had to wade, swim, and drown. Entering a room, dialling a telephone or being thrown from a car was mimed. The actors went down on all fours to represent savage dogs. A male actor played Skinny's mother, whilst a fully-grown adult sat in a pram and played at being Skinny the baby. Properties in *Gum and Goo* amounted to a plastic ball and two hand lamps. The ubiquitous schizophrenic, Mary, crawls into an imaginary, non-existent, igloo. When she is shoved down a hole the actor simply crouched down on the side of

⁶⁹ Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life*, p. 133.

⁷⁰ Vaneigem, p. 133.

⁷¹ Neville, p. 212.

⁷² Neville, p. 224.

⁷³ Neville, p. 225.

⁷⁴ Neville, p. 225.

⁷⁵ Both of these plays were written for the 'Poor Theatre' and there are telling connections between the anti-oedipal theatre and the 'Poor Theatre' of Artaud and Grotowski.

the bare playing space. This imaginative use of the bare stage was significant because, like a playground, it illustrated how the stage space harboured the potential to become the interior of a house or a street scene. The actors and theatre workers were simply working towards re-introducing play back into the theatre space in a more complex reengagement within cultural artefacts and aesthetics at large. Homologous to the reinstatement of the schizophrenic to the performance area, play regained its importance via the framing sequence wherein theatre lent symbolic capital to the thing re-framed/re-evaluated, play, in a different, though connected, act of aesthetic unity.

Furthermore, the reintroduction of play within the political-theatre experience, signified to the audience that, like the playful infant, they, too, must actively participate in the meaning making process of the playful event. For instance, they had to imagine that the bare space was Bridlington sands or a rocky outcrop, a wood at night or an orphanage. This recourse to the imagination had political import because the rational oedipalised spectator, in tunnelling beneath the surface of their adopted adult role, effectively killed-off their internalised parents on re-entering, like the actors on stage, the world of the play's playing, and hypothetically reclaimed the repressed child within themselves.⁷⁶ Certainly, in their content, poor plays killed off oedipalising parents whose function, they said, was to put an end to infantile play. Skinny Spew, a typified everychild, drowns his mother and father in the sea to free himself from the wider cultural authoritarianism which stops him, and wider society, 'weeing in the sea'. He wants to 'kill of all Mums and Dads' so that the world can be 'all Play' (*The Education of Skinny Spew* Scene 3). Mary in *Gum and Goo*, indicates that adult law prevents children playing, using their imagination, and, in the end, expressing polymorphous sexuality. She sees only one way out: 'I'll burn the houses down and burn the mums and dads down. I'll burn my mum and dad down. Specially my mum...and when all the world was burnt I'd be happy' (*Gum and Goo* Scene 3).

To merely kill off internalised biological parents was never enough, though, for political theatre. The anti-oedipal logic that underpinned it demanded the spectator be set free, in an Artaudian sense, from the cultural

⁷⁶ Of course many aspects of this technical poverty are necessitated by economic imperatives and also exhibit a homologous anti-spectacle logic, rather than an anti-oedipal one (which I will examine in chapter 5). But technical poverty is also anti-oedipal for in it the dramatist and theatre workers announced their refusal of the work ethic for work is done in modern societies to produce money. In this way they made theatre or culture without the by products of work relying, instead, upon play.

authoritarianism of the text created by the artist/writer or 'God-author'.⁷⁷ As an alternative to performance passivity which rendered the spectator dependent upon realistic or imagined worlds - created by technicians, set designers, sound engineers, costume designers, and writers - aesthetic authorities, like the text, had to be eradicated. In the embodied theatre this was achieved by placing the spectator's body at the centre of the dramatic event. Play-theatre, by encouraging the spectator to play around with their own imagination affectively involved the audience's own body, its material intelligence, not the information inculcated within it, within the aesthetics of the performance event. Again the reader/spectator was to be reborn as a site of potential productive and democratic meaning - or non-meaning. More broadly these gestures aimed towards the creation of a new aesthetic, one which allowed a certain *autonomy* to the spectator. Laing and Cooper's institutions of anti-psychiatry, it must be recalled, demanded participation and existential parity between subjects, patients, and doctors. By returning the locus of meaning from the prescriptive playwright to the subject, anti-psychiatric drama was exercising a homological act of anti-elitist authority. On entering the unmade world of the play an active and *democratic* engagement of the audience's own imagination was reengineered. Meaning making and aesthetic creation was no longer the exclusive territory of an artistic elite, but a wider, formerly excluded, community; a radical anti-elitism reflected in the anti-psychiatrist's wider call to deconstruct all hierarchical categorisation. If a psychiatrist was no longer deemed the only arbiter of truth, within anti-oedipal theatre, imagination was no longer exclusive to the field of the artist. And so, by homology, the spectator, rather than remain a passive subject receiving the authoritarian view of the dramatist, became active, and, like the schizophrenic, a locus of potentially radical insight.

"Power to the Imagination"

If anti-oedipal thought asserted that all human beings are a potential creative force and possess an essential ability to think outside the parameters of normative rational discourse - a theory reflected in the May'68 maxim "Power to the Imagination" - in political theatre productions the contemporary return to the imagination was highlighted by the playful and childish form of the post-'68 playwright's art. In *Gum and Goo*, for instance, when two adults played at

⁷⁷ Perez, p. 37.

playing at playing children, the discussion around the question of alternative familial arrangements had a fantastic quality:

Greg. 'Ere. I bet her dad's a gorilla.

Phil. I bet her Ma's a Ford Cortina.

Greg. Don't be stupid. A gorilla and a Ford Cortina can't have sex.

Phil. Yeah, they can.

Greg. Can't.

Phil. Can.

Greg. Where would the gorilla put it then? That's what I'd like to know.

Phil. In her petrol pump!

Greg. Up her exhaust! (*Gum and Goo Scene 1*)

Even if it is the children's exchange which describes this disordered world where exhausts become vaginas, cars become potential sexual partners, and gorillas fathers, the imagery is absurd because the play was intentionally written to refute everyday 'common sense'. This is its political potential. The power of the imagination resides in its capacity to imagine and create different worlds out of the everyday given, whether to escape that world in fantasy, or re-create a different order for orthodox society. In the last example *Gum and Goo* pictured alternative familial relationships. In other sections the imagination is described as utopian place where it is 'Christmas...and magic all day' (*Gum and Goo Scene 1*). By contrast, when children offer-up new codes of thinking, they are chastised by adults for 'telling lies'. Similarly, the adult/childish fantasies we see extrapolated in comic-strip books - *Gum and Goo* references Batman, Captain America, Rubber Man, The Great Stretcho, and Superman - are criticised by a child's father, as being 'unutterably stupid', 'for kids' (*Gum and Goo Scene 1*). Although a fictional piece of writing, this last remark about the validity of DC comics is particularly significant because it encapsulates the threat the childish aesthetics of *Oz* or *Nasty Tales* posed to oedipalised society. Contemporary counter-cultural art or writing indicated an adolescent refusal to be oedipalised, to grow up. The censorial statement also implicated the performance spectator. Reminiscent of the adult who still buys comics or underground magazines, the attendee of poor theatre had purchased a form of theatre which was comic-book in its deployment of playful, fantastic, and childish idioms. It was comic-book, and so *childish*, in style. Cultural Infantilism was politically pertinent because this form of poor theatre was predominantly

performed at lunchtime.⁷⁸ As a consequence plays potentially played to adults in a form of articulation antithetical to the modes of existence accepted within normative technological society. *Gum and Goo* and *The Education of Skinny Spew*, two cases in point, both presented the lunchtime audience with activities antipathetic to workaday society's codes of behaviour. In one hour, a period of time equivalent to the bounded play-time of the schoolyard, the adult worker was confronted with a brief glimpse of a forgotten world as they watched playful adults pretending to be babies, dogs, or, lost in concentration, juggling balls. Moreover, in presenting a poor theatre, a drama that appeared cobbled together without hard work or overt manufacture, political-theatre workers offered an alternative to hard-work *per se*. The refusal to spend large amounts of money upon props indicated a correspondent denunciation of the dictates of exchange economies.

Equally, by refusing to treat the spectator as a passive receptacle for their theoretical anti-oedipal ideas about the essential equality of play and creativity - they actually produced imaginative and creatively diverse theatre, rather than purely relying on a linguistic (oedipal) drama - they were creating a space within which the spectator could experience this truth for themselves. In the first instance this was done to awaken those viewing the piece that they too were free to imagine a different non-oedipal, work-free, pro-play alternative society. In offering different aesthetic forms poor theatre introduced the threatening possibility of having to think about alternative forms of everyday life. By facilitating a space within which freethinking and non-censorial forms of living could be envisaged, theatre became a non-normalising field of experience, a new beneficent, benevolent space. The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, for instance, noted that, 'It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self'.⁷⁹ Therefore

⁷⁸ In 'Subversion at Lunchtime', chapter 10 of *Dreams and Deconstructions*, Rosalind Asquith recalls how the Soho Poly, a venue which championed lunchtime theatre, and premiered the work of Brenton and Wilson, was important in that it not only attracted 'ordinarily disinterested audiences' because of its 'accessibility and cheapness', but 'by inserting entertainment into the working day, the bourgeois categorisation of time into 'work' and 'leisure' would be disrupted'. Roland Rees staged *Gum and Goo* and *The Education of Skinny Spew* at the Ambience Lunchtime theatre, then situated at the Green Banana, Soho, London. See Craig, p. 145. Rees, p. 203.

⁷⁹ Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 54. Raoul Vaneigem points out in his *Cavalier History of Surrealism* that despite his certain criticism, Surrealism had a positive need to satisfy its propensity to playfulness and as such displayed a residual 'resistance to oppression by the family'. It also was vehemently anti-psychiatry and evoked a childhood which must create the conditions to restore the 'liberation of children' p 21, 26, 56, 57.

- although by making a theatrical event they were constructing a political aesthetic occasion - poor theatre overtly indicated its politics through the politics of its form. *Its form was its meaning* - playing offers a concrete route map to authentic living, not traditional revolutionary politics. The unified non-alienated self is to be found in the refutation of adaptation to external reality, philosophical dogma, and historical political ideas and remade in a playful space, a space promoted in the anti-psychiatric communes of David Cooper's Villa 21 or Ronald Laing's Kingsley Hall.⁸⁰

It is an awareness of the political importance of space that informed how Brenton's plays for the Poor Theatre were presented. When he emphasised the significance of the proximity of the audience to the aesthetic form, this was done so that spectators were not excluded or *put at a distance* from the space of playing, but included. Thinking in this way we can conceptualise lunchtime theatre as an alternative playground, it sought to facilitate the attendant worker's playtime. Removed from the pathological everyday performance space of roles and the workplace, political theatre offered therapeutic community in a communal setting. If participation in creativity, imagination, and bodily desire was considered healthy and authentic, poor theatre also set itself the task of de-schizophrenising the spectator. In pursuit of aesthetic and political homology plays in the mould of *The Education of Skinny Spew, Gum and Goo*, and *Christie in Love*, therefore attempted to heal the social whole by creating, as the Situationists demanded, a new existential social *situation*. In contrast to the rational analysis of the self, redolent of psychoanalysis's dogged belief in the talking cure in which an authorial analyst/writer imparts meaning to a receptive analysand/spectator, anti-oedipal drama showed that the revolutionary cure is in the *doing* - attending theatre - not the talking, in the *affect* not the understanding; although, of course, these plays did, as we have seen, instruct through language. On the whole this means that we can speak of anti-oedipal theatre as a restorative form of cultural intervention, homologous to the alternative therapeutic forms of living and culture practiced in the anti-psychiatric commune.

⁸⁰ Marcuse, wrote something comparable in *Eros and Civilisation*: 'Ideas of play and display now reveal their full distance from the values of productiveness and performance: play is unproductive and useless precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labour and leisure; it "just plays with reality"'. p.195.

Alternative Currents

Not all schizophrenic dramas - plays that included broad schizophrenic clusters or exhibited schizoid formal articulations - committed to the anti-oedipal cause. *AC/DC* makes politically affirmative readings of schizoid behaviour particularly problematic. On the surface the play substantiates the modish concern with the rhetoric of insanity, anti-psychiatry, and the anti-oedipal counter-culture. Schizophrenic characters refuse, like the May'68 radical, to adopt the repressive sexual and social roles available within the normative Field of the Other. Images of homosexuality, bi-sexuality, group sex, and auto-eroticism celebrated the anything-goes morality of the anti-oedipal logic and dominate the visual aspects of the play. The piece commenced with a scene showing group sex in a photo-booth. In other sections an actor simulated the audible sounds of sexual intercourse by slapping together the internal skin of the mouth. *AC/DC* purposefully contravened public decency with a promiscuity of bad language. Words such as cunt, fucking, cock, shit, and pricks continually intersperse the play. References to the spectator's own sexual proclivities were made with the rhetorical 'fancy a gay lick?' and talk of 'vaginal orgasms' - Williams apparently mirroring the provocative work of Brenton. *AC/DC* derided heterosexual monogamous relations as 'territory-sex', its adherents described as 'Pair binding property pigs' (*AC/DC* Act 1). In keeping with other anti-oedipal art, *AC/DC* refused to obey the rules of everyday syntax and grammar. The dialogue rejoiced in the polymorphous fluidity of anti-oedipal aesthetics, snubbing orthodox codes of meaning or models of communication. The play's schizophrenics converse in a shared 'scatter language' of 'metonymic distortion', the dialogue frequently collapsing into an indecipherable 'delaminated word salad'. One of two schizophrenics, Maurice, recounts a strange sexual encounter with his male lover:

Perowne filled my teeth in a certain way, you see, certain alloys in certain combinations, so that I was picking up TV programmes in my head like a Jew's Harp, and he shoved David Niven-Richard-Harris-Hemmings-Photo-down my arteries and dialling my head very hard, and switching my body clock on, off, on, off, and every time I kissed Perowne I was forced to desalivate because of course Perowne didn't want David Niven's style of kissing, and After I'd kissed Perowne I had to defecate, i.e. not Feke any more, and if I didn't Defecate after, they'd

file down the David-Niven-Pat Boone-fuckin –Hemming-Head to a Sharp Point and when it'd made its transmissions from my fuckin eye, it'd whip round and down to my optic nerve and slash it to bits. (*AC/DC* Act 1)

Moreover, during the performance, the semantic incoherence of Maurice and Perowne was shown to have been assimilated by the counter-culture in its own formation of an alternative vocabulary. As the play starts phrases such as 'Mongolian Cluster Fuck' abound, whilst oppositional youth use metaphors, rather than ordered description, to describe personality. Sadie, Melody and Gary argue that human personality could be a vegetable ('a long white cos lettuce'), a musical instrument ('Mouth organ'), or a dirty habit ('leaving the toilet un-flushed') (*AC/DC* Act 1). In fact much of *AC/DC* is written in this schizo-speak, and so conforms to the anti-oedipal aesthetics I discussed above. By conflating the idiom of the schizoid with that of radical youth, both groups communicate in autonomous alternative-speech currents, *AC/DC* made the distinction between sane and insane, sense and non-sense, blurred, if not bankrupt.

The fundamental tenets of anti-oedipal aesthetics are also present in that surrealism features heavily in the play's irrational aesthetics. A photomaton machine is described by the counter-culturalists as an iron lung or a 'space capsule', whilst Perowne combats the hyper-rational 'irrational' world of America, a global 'psychopath', with his own surreal irrationality.⁸¹ Holding out his hand as if it is a gun to shoot the imperial power with he comments 'how am I expected to fire this gun, when it looks like a cabbage? Hey Mack, I can't fire this gun, the trigger's started menstruating' (*AC/DC* Act 2). This last example is important because it suggests William's agreement with the Lacanian theory that language is despotic, ordering the subject to identify with its cultural imperative that the semantic stratum is that code in which the subject must live, move, and articulate its being. By contrast *AC/DC* played around with language to advertise the playwright's and wider counter-culture's homological refusal to live in these ordered states. Rephrased within the terms of coincidences of struggle, the drama positioned itself within the field of linguistic outsidership in such a way to suggest its own identification with the comparable struggles of the anti-oedipal underground. Indeed, in *The Making of a Counter Culture*

⁸¹ Many of the plays I have examined here can be said to also combat a hyper-rationalised society with hyper-irrational images and forms. For example the instrumental use of a necrophiliac killer to argue the case for permissive libertarianism.

(1970) Theodore Roszak argued that, during the sixties and seventies, American and British youth sought a style and vocabulary -catchphrases - to confront the 'egomaniacal' world they rejected in favour of a positive antinomianism.⁸² To conform to the rules of social language was homological to conforming to all laws, cultural, social, and sexual. Conversely, Roszak noted (and as I have shown) the dominant culture looked upon these linguistic codes, physical lifestyles, and amoral aesthetics with fear, taxing its behaviour as 'scandalous' whilst the counter-culture shouted 'marvellous'.⁸³ In Short, *AC/DC* appealed to the post'68 generation because, on the surface, it espoused a hyperbolic eroticism, and produced a liberated aesthetic which conformed to the Situationist call for a new micro politics of desire.

At the same time, by foregrounding desire, the anti-oedipal philosophies articulated in *AC/DC* were not only fashionably anti-rationalistic, but partook of the contemporary chic self-absorption, the search for the authentic self, Cooper and Laing so clearly articulated. However, unlike *Mary Barnes*, *The Education of Skinny Spew*, *Gum And Goo*, *Blowjob* or *Pignight*, in this drama it is not internalised parents schizoid characters endeavour to exorcise, but inculcated personalities internalised through identification with the media. Perowne and Maurice, for example, are infected with borrowed selves radiated to the masses by Hollywood movie stars, rock artists, or literary heroes. Perowne contracts 'media rash' from 'chewing Elizabeth Taylor's clitoris' (*AC/DC* Act 2). Other characters have subconsciously adopted the stereotypical role of the wild-drinking-fighting persona of the-alcoholic-poet, in this case Brendan Behan. But these pop and film stars are also shown to be un-stable dependent egos. They, too, are a miscegenation of inherited behavioural and aesthetic roles gleaned from other stars. Elvis is simply a shrunken synthetic impostor of the Black American performer Arthur "big boy" Crudup.

More interestingly, *AC/DC* proffered that media stars steal that which is instinctual, and thus latent, in everyone (sexuality and power, say) which is then sold back to those who simply watch images of their own lost authentic selfhood. Perowne, the schizophrenic, who, fittingly, realises through his insane-sanity that he is constructed of multiple personalities, articulates this by pointing at a wall of photos of film and pop stars and says:

⁸² Roszak, p. 137.

⁸³ Roszak, p. 147.

Whatever it is ...I just feel that these things there they're stealing one's instinctual patterns. They're stealing them. They're forging them. They're slowing them up. They're speeding them up. They're reproducing them twenty times a day. They're unloading you. They're overloading you. (AC/DC Act 2)

This particularly politically charged observation took on greater gravity when the spectator was forced to apprehend that the infectious fascination of the media with the self that Perowne expresses, was homological to the fascination writers and publications held with the world of the schizoid. It also implicated them. For the cult of the schizophrenic and rhetoric of insanity we see promoted, articulated, and patronised in anti-oedipal theatre, is itself acutely *parasitic* and exploitative of schizoid personalities which it steals, condenses, and sells back to the theatre consumer as desirable ways of living. The aesthetic tendency to what AC/DC identifies as 'psychic parasitism' or 'predatory sewage' is rather surprisingly, given his own cult status, indicated through a critique of the anti-psychiatrist R.D. Laing.⁶⁴ AC/DC suggested that Laing had constructed his own career through assimilating the vocabulary and behavioural forms of the schizophrenic, translating them into a life-style. Maurice describes Laing as a man who 'gets an erection from the vibrations from mental hospitals' and in his celebrity role 'likes to have people clocking him twenty four hours a day' (AC/DC Act 2).

Ironically, then, AC/DC deployed a schizophrenic to turn the tables on Laing, and accuses the anti-psychiatrist of only being interested in the 'most decorative schizos', stealing the 'poor sods' accents, and stealing his 'patient's best ideas' (AC/DC Act 2). What is more, when the schizophrenic tells Laing that 'it doesn't feel like me talking', communicating that he wishes to be rid of these internalised voices, Laing refuses to help, adding 'we're trying to help you hang on to what may be a very precious experience' (AC/DC Act 2).

As we have seen, the idea that schizophrenia was a route to personal enlightenment was common currency in the field of anti-oedipal struggle. Laing encouraged acceptance and adoption of the condition in his widely read books, texts which became counter-cultural classics. The problem remains, however, that, within the Laingian promotion of the mad experience his patients were practically anonymous, and so the drama was arguing that that his anti-oedipal

⁶⁴ See Footnote #22 for a synopsis of Laing's media stardom.

celebration of schizophrenia had become more important than the real suffering of material human beings. Conversely *AC/DC* made the case that a schizophrenic does not celebrate the schizophrenia which informed anti-oedipal writing because he/she had read these books 'at source'. As I have argued, this fictionalised critique went further than an assault upon the anti-psychiatrist. The accusation that Laing was having a holiday in other people's misery was widened to a confrontation with the anti-oedipal spectator of schizophrenia. More accurate, *AC/DC* was significant - and different - because it formed a negative reevaluation of anti-oedipal theatre *per se*. When Perowne discusses the stealing of instinctual patterns it was the writers, producers, actors, and audience who were being assailed, implicated in the avant-garde's parasitism on the mad, a practice which stretched back to the nineteenth-century sanatoria of Paris, Salpêtrière, and reasserted itself in the Surrealists' affectation and assimilation of madness in the early twentieth century.⁸⁵

From this perspective we can see that, in contradiction to current vogue, *AC/DC* proposed that anti-oedipal art forms were often less about the positive articulation of madness, and more about the *affectation* of madness as form. The reputation of schizophrenics as arbitrators of an alternative cultural idiom - 'athletes of the extra-verbal' - came to be worn as a badge of pride by the artist/poet who, having identified him/herself to be schizophrenic, basked in the reflected site of homological aesthetic, social, and sexual outsidership.⁸⁶ Whereas *AC/DC* indicated that the schizophrenic was, like "big boy" Crudup, the original imprint within a continuous media chain which assumed models of schizophrenic selfhood to further its own counter-cultural project. In Williams' play, therefore, anti-oedipal productions, by association, stood implicitly accused of simulating and manipulating madness and schizophrenia to suit their own ends. By the time the condition had been reworked and synthesised into artwork all that was left was an indecipherable random noise which bore no relation to the original schizophrenic model of what it was like to be a schizophrenic. It is for this reason that *AC/DC* presented a parodic representation of anti-psychiatric discourse and aesthetics borrowed from the laws and codes of anti-psychiatric texts, texts which had previously lifted and grafted models of syntax and attitudes from the schizophrenic, a strategy which rendered the play ultimately meaningless.

⁸⁵ See Martha Noel-Evans, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (London: Cornell Press-Ithaca, 1991).

⁸⁶ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 120.

Alternative or Direct Power

From an anti-oedipal perspective, if *AC/DC* appears to have been in conflict with other pro-schizophrenic artefacts, whether books, paintings, poems, or plays, the anomaly can be justified within its own terms of reference. *Inter alia*, if anti-oedipal theory denies singular despotic perspectives, this means schizophrenia can be understood either as a positive attitude to anti-oedipal living or a negative painful symptom of existential pain. Cooper admitted this in his own work. He realised that madness was caused by capitalist and familial modes of repression, and so he acknowledged the real pain inflicted in rational oedipal living. As I have tried to show, he also argued, however, that the schizophrenic's failure to integrate within the field of the Other is a positive symptom. The schizophrenic was thought subversive because madness makes him or her un-governable. In terms of the revolutionary struggle, the schizophrenic's refusal of authority was made homologous to the need to ignite a wider structural refusal of social repression in which radicalised subjects refused

aprioristic systematisation [and] moves through phases of de-structuring, un-conditioning, de-educating and de-familializing ourselves so that we at last get on familiar but unfamiliar terms with ourselves and are then ready to re-structure ourselves in a manner that refuses all personal taboos and consequently will revolutionise the whole society.⁸⁷

Though he acknowledged the revolution must become macro, a 'revolution in terms of a far more direct paralysis of the operations of the State',⁸⁸ ultimately Cooper believed that human society could only re-invent itself if there had been a *micro* rebellion first. An alternative revolution would condense radical subversion into the biological demands of desire, a revolution inextricably connected to a revolution in madness. As a consequence, Cooper called for an *alternative revolution*, a revolt of the essential self, and a return to the *materia prima* of life was the project of Situationism, anti-oedipal aesthetics, and radical a-political political theatre.

The disordered style of personal revolt anti-oedipalism imagined all sounds well and good, but the theory had an underlying theoretical fault-line. In the existent social field of struggles, those schizophrenics who commendably

⁸⁷ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 107.

⁸⁸ Cooper, *Death of the Family*, p. 124.

break the unnameable expectations society has of decency and reality emphatically were - and still are - working class. The vast majority of the inmates of psychiatric hospitals are comprised of this social group. It is noted by serious social scientists that there is strong evidence that those who develop schizophrenia are disadvantaged educationally, socially, and occupationally, the lower the social status the higher the incidence of schizophrenia.⁸⁹ Those without power are driven mad by an economically repressive society, excluded on grounds of class and the division of labour. By refusing to engage with traditional oedipal politics - the struggle which addresses the economic and existential causes of madness, the socio-economic conditions in which one finds oneself - anti-oedipal and a-political radical theatre abandoned mentally distressed individuals - the broader proletariat - without hope. Political theatre enacted an aesthetic performativity of *being seen to embrace* the plight of a specific disadvantaged section of everyday life, without tangibly assisting in the removal of the root causes of their distress, the economy. Like Laing, anti-oedipal political theatre can be criticised for revelling in a prestigious 'spectacle of madness', rather than praised for its alleviation of psychic pain.

A-politicism is symptomatic of much anti-oedipal activity. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the schizophrenic be left where he/she is.⁹⁰ Vaneigem suggested that the mentally ill should be set free because their incarceration is simply a compensatory function to those who *have* undergone identification, and adopted pathological roles. But none offer a political solution to release the psychological pain of the mad, although they do stay true to a version of Marxism. In reality the insane are commonly co-opted to support the avant-garde's project, which always wants to play and be creative. By contrast, AC/DC argued schizophrenics do not want to play, they want a cure, namely ECT, 'the juice' (AC/DC Act 2). To summarise, the play, in this reading, made the case that the end to schizoid suffering can only be found in the reclamation of material and *direct* Power, not the *alternative* power celebrated by the anti-oedipal counter-culture.

Putting this criticism of counter-cultural practice - and its sub-field post-'68 political theatre - to one side, by indicating the counter-cultural assertion that playful activity and imaginative modes of being are essential forms of activity, in their form, not only in their content (which as we have seen is paradoxically oedipal), was, perhaps, post-'68 anti-oedipal theatre's most

⁸⁹ Gross, *Psychology*, p. 950.

⁹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 23.

radical contribution to revolutionary theory. As Farren records, this was a milieu when forms of living and expression became threatening in their own right. Politicking was no longer a straightforward case of exhibiting cultural solidarity in one's content, what one might write or say, though this is still valid, but in confronting the state of things in modes and coda outside of normal frames of reference. When theatre, the most adult and bourgeois of genres, perhaps, reverted to the forms and sexual games of childhood and adolescence, favouring the characters of American colour comics to classical mythical figures, epitomised by Oedipus Rex, it challenged the whole way of life of a society. This returns us to what I called the politics of gesture in the introductory chapter. If this anti-oedipal theatre was to support the period's alternative politics of identification, a time in which Hobsbawn euphemistically notes familial social arrangements began to change at 'express speed', a transition which brought about the 'crisis of the family',⁹¹ although only political with a small 'p', this political theatre was revolutionary in that its gestures led by example. Rejecting the culture of its own past and inherited tradition political theatre refused to reproduce a theatre like mommy's and daddy's. In its own homological way, it suggested that one must not only reject one's own parents but oedipal society and culture. In refusing to hold a positive mirror up to social law, moral codes of taste, or rational behaviour, so reproducing a facsimile of the field of the Other, Brenton, Edgar, and Wilson refused to take part in the circular regeneration of unhealthy subjects. As an alternative to extant theatre of the Other, schizoid dramas made the case that schizophrenics and schizoid imagery must be decoded as desirable signs of a true unrepressed selfhood, indicators of the natural will to live passionately - but not as readable signs of madness.

Finally, it has to be said that, to believe that these playwrights or performances were advocating necrophilia, incest, or paedophilia, would be a misrepresentation of contemporary reality. Even Neville admitted that the underground, Oz that is, was not hell bent upon sexual anarchy or sexual exploitation, but a cultural intervention to challenge received mores. The student who penned the Rupert Bear cartoon argued that 'people don't listen if you don't shock them into sitting upright in the first place'.⁹² The Situationist White Panther Farren, also tried for obscenity, argued that *Nasty Tales* was a

⁹¹ Eric Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 - 1991* (London: Abacus, 2001), p. 321 & 322.

⁹² *Daily Mail*, 29 July, 1970.

cultural intervention for the public good, the purpose of which was to 'question hallowed attitudes' establishment figures and the 'establishment itself'.⁹³ By homology, anti-oedipal cultural production, theatre in particular, was a comparable structural device to shock society into new frames of thinking, even though those they offered were extreme examples of liberation. Anti-oedipal theatre can be accused of bending the oedipal stick further perhaps than many thought it should go, but it did so in order to make sure the stick never went back to where it was. A particular telling verification of this pursuit of social subversion, what Baz Kershaw calls performance efficacy,⁹⁴ can be seen in a scene from the *Oz* trial. Asked by a solicitor if reading a comic piece on oral sex had perverted his mind, the detective in charge of the case (a figure uncannily redolent of Brenton's policeman in *Christie in Love*) answered that consequently his mind had been drifting into unwanted thoughts and images of a penis.

⁹³ *News of the World*, 17 January, 1973.

⁹⁴ See Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.1-3.

Chapter 2: Political Theatre and The Occupations Movement

Individuals do not move about in social space in a random way, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space (e.g. through the objective mechanisms of elimination and channelling), and partly because they resist the forces of the social field with their specific inertia, that is, their properties, which may exist in embodied form, as dispositions...
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

It was a very great shock for a whole generation of socialists to live... with the steady accumulation of overwhelming evidence of all that had gone wrong with the Russian Revolution... now the Two Traditions had Broken down... On the one hand, Stalinism, on the other hand, that inevitability of gradualism, which you can call, in short hand, Fabianism. Neither Stalinism nor Fabianism, which in the 1930s had seemed the two main competitors in the Socialist tradition, any longer offered us either an acceptable intellectual system or viable mode of political action.
Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope*.

What Does the Movement Want? The Realisation of a Classless Society Through the Power of Workers' Councils. Street Poster: Counsel for the Maintenance of Occupations.
René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement*.

The Return of Syndicalism: Georg Sorel and the Occupation Movement

Having seized control of the University of Paris, the Occupation Movement (OM) called for the immediate occupation of 'every factory in France'. 'Comrades' in tune with this ideal were advised to 'reproduce and distribute this appeal' in as many places and fields of articulation as possible.¹ In support of their call radicals made large street posters and sprayed graffiti which suggested, "Occupy the Factories" or "Either You Take Over The Factories, The Offices, The Banks And All The Means Of Production Or You'll Disappear Without A Trace!"²

Although May'68 may have failed, over the next decade post-'68 political theatre responded to the OM's challenge and reorganized its own space and form of communication, the stage and performance event, to distribute comparable calls to occupation. The activities and theoretical spirit of the OM were represented with exceptional contemporary detail in David Caute's *The Demonstration* (1969). Staged only one year after the *événements*, the seizure of the imagined university theatre by radical students reproduced an opportune

¹ René Viénet. *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May '68* (London: Rebel Press, 1992), p. 53.

² Viénet, p. 63 & 73.

facsimile of the occupation of the Odeon Theatre Paris. Similarly contemporaneous with the Paris occupations, and performed only one year later, the suitably titled *Occupations* (1970) marked out Trevor Griffiths' support for OM theory by replaying the Turin strike of 1920 when workers' councils occupied the Italian Fiat car factory and resumed production under their own control, before reformist wage increases broke the strike - Griffiths used Fiat to draw important parallels with the collapse of the May'68 occupations movement. Following closely on from the themes explored in *Occupations* Griffiths' modish awareness of the contemporary aspects of spatial occupation can be seen in his later production *The Party* (1973) when live footage of the 'night of the barricades' - film clips showed students and workers fighting off police attempts to retake the occupied Latin Quarter - were projected onto a wall in the National Theatre, London. Three years on, also at the National Theatre, Howard Brenton's *Weapons of Happiness* (1976) indicated to the audience the ease with which workers might occupy their workplace when the fictional workforce was shown taking control of factory machinery. In the same year, a play which to all intents displayed only slight interest in the activities of the OM, *Destiny* (1976), scenes of occupation were still in evidence. David Edgar's play showed Asian foundry-workers protest against the ineffectuality of union representation, the 'Association of Diecasters and Foundrymen', by taking-over their office. Inseparable from the OM's call to occupy, communiqués in the form of pamphlets demanded that industrial labour form workers' councils. Smaller than the wall-poster or graffiti, these pocket-sized tracts, printed in their thousands, spread common OM slogans such as "All Power To The Workers' Councils" or "Long Live The International Association Of Workers" to a broad audience.³ Post-'68 political theatre committed to advocating the formation of worker's councils, posted comparable calls to industrial collectivisation. A case in point is Stephen Lowe's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1978). Although performed ten years after the demise of May'68, a large political banner unfurled at the play's end defiantly declared "Workers Unite".

To comprehend the political logic that underpinned political theatre's call to occupy and form workers' councils - the significant clusters of dramatised 'occupations' and references to workers' councils clearly evident in post'68 political drama - we must return to the radical syndicalism which informed OM

³ Viénet, p.65 & 75.

theory, a political philosophy championed by Georg Sorel (1847-1922). Sorel argued that historically - monopolised by intellectuals and artists - the abstract ideas put forward in Marxism or Anarchism, despite their socialist intentions, had remained, on the whole, detached from everyday life and the workers they were designed to liberate. And this residual gap between political theory and practice is maintained because, homologous to the workers' alienation from the owners and means of production, generally speaking manual labourers are *physically* excluded from intellectuals and academic spaces, working and living in very different, often exclusive, environments - the factory and the university, for instance. They are also detached *functionally*, for having separated out intellectual work from manual employment, they perform different roles in the social division of labour, intellectuals are figured as 'workers by brain', proletarians 'workers by hand'. Finally, the working-class are *culturally* distanced from Marxist theory, the complexity of intellectual and aesthetic products put up intellectual barriers separating workers and intellectuals.⁴ The divisiveness of this situation was, for Sorel, illustrated most keenly in the bureaucratic domination of workers by the Communist Party or reformist trade-union representation. Separated from the workers they are meant to represent, the party bureaucrat or union leader arrests any radical autonomy from those they seek to ultimately empower through their own command of the theoretical field.⁵

In response to this situation, Sorel stressed the importance of the *active* elements of Marxist theory, over and above the purely *theoretical*.⁶ In contrast to indirect dry and interminable debates about Marxist theory, abstract forms of activity which merely speak of seizing means of reproduction, syndicalism insisted workers embrace the kind of *direct concrete* action visible in the act of physical occupation. To create a radical and empowered society of collective membership, democracy must have its actual genesis in a participatory event; if not revolution, then at least in occupation. Moreover, it is only through collective autonomous action - free from the control of party bureaucrats and union leaders - that workers can escape from the field of theory and move toward *being* political themselves. At the heart of Sorel's thought, therefore, was a root and branch call for the proletariat to recapture the means of economic production and to regain control of *intellectual production*. Such a reclamation

⁴See Karl Korsch, 'A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Marxism',

<http://www2.cddc.vt.edu/bps/CF/korsch.html>, p.1.

⁵P.D. Anthony, *The Ideology of Work* (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 108 -112.

⁶Korsch, p.1.

of the intellectual field could only be engineered if workers returned to the original design of the soviets which underpinned the utopian collective society of the Soviet Union, encapsulated in Lenin's famous maxim "All Power to the Soviets". (see figure 6).

For example, in 1905 Russian soviets or workers' councils set-up to wrest control from the State and Czar. Innovative industrial structures, soviets handed-back the management of industrial production, and wider social decision making, to metalworkers or engineers (say), so forming an alternative source of power. Open and democratic, judgments of public or political import were made entirely by the elected assembly of workers. Support for their hard-won autonomy was maintained by printing their own newspapers, and the establishment of a militia.⁷ The former guaranteed councilist power by distributing ideological material, the latter ensured the distribution of the results of their own production, what they produced, as *they*, not the state, saw fit. In modern terms, then, a soviet or workers' council would be a democratic autonomous organisation in which *all* workers freely participate in the construction of every aspect, whether it be the intellectual, economic, cultural, or political sphere of their everyday lives. Because this ultra-democracy can only be engendered by a seizure of *all* means of production, in physical terms this necessitates both the seizure of the factory and the reclamation of all other partitioned social spaces, particularly cultural ones.

Texts which advocated the power of workers' councils played an important role in the revolutionary politics of May'68. For instance, in the months leading up to *événements*, several thousand copies of Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*,⁸ manuscripts which advocated a return to the soviet ideal, were freely distributed by the neo-syndicalist OM. Reminiscent of Sorel, Vaneigem and Debord argued that the artificial division between worker and intellectual must be disassembled, whilst also arguing that other separations, artist/worker, art/life, work/life, the party/the masses, political leaders/political followers must also be deconstructed in a radical elimination of all hierarchy.⁹ Most importantly, though, the books attacked the artificial cultural division between politics and art, particularly politicised space and aesthetic areas. By disseminating these

⁷ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 190-191.

⁸ Knabb, Ken, ed, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995) p. 241.

⁹ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), p. 78.

radical ideas in either their original form, or paraphrased in edited pamphlets or snappy street-graffiti, the OM sought to expose as broad an audience as possible to syndicalist ideas, not only intellectuals. Thinking homologically, we can argue that the extremely public approach the OM took to transmitting the call to occupation and formation of workers' councils deconstructed Sorel's trilogy of cultural, spatial, and functional separations in and through its formal articulation. For defiantly pasted onto a brick wall or sprayed across an unused doorway, posters or graffiti removed previously cocooned Marxist theory from intellectual spaces. With radical philosophy thrust into the open of a divergent public domain, we can recognise the OM's closure of spatial difference between the intellectual fields of the masses and those inhabited by an elite cognoscenti. Equally, the distribution of political theory by means of poster, pamphlet, or graffiti, undermined the *control of theory* by the intelligentsia, in becoming public property it regained accessibility and a new relevance to everyday life. Fly-posting political literature also undermined the functional prestige of the intellectual and academic institution, if a brick-wall was a suitable site for political communication, what need was there for the university, political text, or bourgeois theorist? What is more, the directness and plain language of the painted slogan or printed poster was far removed from complicated theoretical writings, and so closed the cultural gap. In the juxtaposition of a screen-printed poster with socialist theory the OM reunited a form of art with political content and ended their hitherto social compartmentalisation in one radical gesture. Put differently, by synthesising two fields of diverse production, the fusion of art and abstract politics exemplified the Situationists' pursuit of unified *homological praxis*.

Correspondingly, the homological significance of the revolutionary posters produced at occupied art colleges in France and Britain (see figure 9) was that, produced by the socially-removed artist, art became reconnected to the political by actively supporting the revolutionary call to end class society. Furthermore, in seizing their own means of production, the screen-printing machine, say, radical students exhibited a strict adherence to syndicalist philosophy; by taking control of the means of production the artist signalled a recognition of his/her status as worker. Indeed, it is during the late 1960s that art students woke up to their own complicity in reproducing capitalist society. Feeling a long way away from being the detached romantic artist - above politics or issues of class - they realised that their design skills and art products were made to work for industry. In Britain, for example, art students argued that, funded by industrial grants, art

and design courses were *recuperated* into creating nothing more radical than aesthetically pleasing cups, cabinets, or t-shirts for capitalist production, their art merely fed a rampant consumerism.

In an attempt to reverse this process students argued that art and design skills should be transferred to problem solving on a wider scale, turned against the capitalist agents who exploited these abilities. Designers started to think of themselves no longer as *passive* recipients of knowledge, but as *active* problem-solvers. Rephrased, art-students, having retaken control of the art-school space, re-aligned their skills as *workers* with the wider workers' struggle. Ranged against an extensive capitalism which exploited both parties in the name of capitalism and economic expansion, art was to be put to work in a functional broad-based *communal* struggle.¹⁰ London's Hornsey Art School was a particular case in point. Here, undergraduates came to understand that, in opposition to what political specialists or elitist intellectuals would have them believe, 'there wasn't much difference between solving the problems of a teacup and those of the factory where it was made; and, if you could solve a factory's problems, you could do the same for the world at large'.¹¹

Political Theatre Seized the Means of Production

Post'68, British political theatre workers realised that they too could play an instrumental part in industrial agitation by putting their own talents to a more communal struggle. Going beyond producing literary texts which merely reflected the *événements*, comparable to the work of Vaneigem, Debord, and Sorel, political theatre workers made dramas to distribute the very syndicalist

¹⁰ See Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p 185 -186. During the occupation of Hornsey Art School in London, for instance, students complained that, forced to clock-in at 9:30am and stay until 6pm, 'the effect of this was to make the college more like a factory than a place of higher education'. This was done to prepare the students for the 'realities of industrial life'. *News of the World*, 'What Really Happened at Hornsey', 13 September, 1970, p. 43.

¹¹ 'What Happened at Hornsey', p. 39. In observing the attitudes expressed at Hornsey, we can begin to form a broader understanding of why OM agitation started within the University system. 'On the Poverty of Student Life', for example, argued that the modern university had become no more than cog in the industrial machine, turning out managers and technocrats for the control and manipulation of workers, training its students to fit into, and reproduce, the hierarchical economic system of an industrialised society. Yet, as Daniel Cohn-Bendit observed, the occupation of French universities was crucial in that, as an exemplary radical gesture, it was catalytic in sparking the largest general strike that ever stopped the economy of an advanced industrial country. See Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 27-28. Louis Althusser theorises the homological repositioning of a university system which supports the exploitative structures of industry in his *Essays on Ideology*, (London, New York, Verso, 1993), see chapter 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus'.

theories which guided the occupations. Stephen Lowe's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, for instance, positioned Joint Stock on the side of the working proletariat by advancing the argument that the everyday lot of the manual worker is hard, dirty, and uncomfortable. The performance indicated that workers have no control or autonomy over their everyday existence. The play shows them alienated from any form of creative, cultural or intellectual involvement.¹² At the works outing, for example, the men or 'hands' are seated away from the masters or 'brains'. Moreover, during the space/time of the performance Lowe inserted this speech from the capitalist Rushton to demonstrate how capitalism maintains and reproduces the existent hierarchical order:

The Masters cannot do without the men, and the men cannot do without the masters...It's a simple matter of division of Labour. The men work with their hands, the masters with their brains...if only masters and men would do this, we'd all soon see that everything would work out...that [is] the true solution of the social problems, and not the silly nonsense talked by people who go around waving red flags. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act 2/1*)

Initially the capitalist's position was tempered when Harlow put the case for co-operation and negotiation - avoiding class conflicts created by the division of labour - a political attitude we see aired in the parliamentary reformism of socialist Fabianism.¹³

Harlow: got to stop the rot somewhere, or it makes a mock of your whole life...if we all stand together, he'll [the capitalist] have to back

¹² Lowe's simultaneous refutation of capitalism and reformist socialism, and, therefore, plain call for a return to radical Marxist/syndicalist political demands, can be identified in the play's written introduction. Lowe points out that, just as the book's author, Robert Tressell, refused to embrace the call for moderation within a trade-union-backed Labour party several decades earlier, he too could not support a Labour movement 'nominally committed to socialist principles'. He argues that Tressell is an important and relevant contemporary figure, because, as a member of the Marxist Socialist Democratic Federation in 1906, he opposed the then emergent Labour Party in its reformist parliamentary direction. Lowe argues that decisions were made then that have affected all our lives. That is, by refusing to seize the means of reproduction, the reformist workers' movement simply reproduced, though ameliorated, the hierarchical separations in society; thus 'denying our human creativity' and the possibilities 'open to all of us'. Hence the suitability of *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* to reassert the importance of workers' councils and seizing the means of all forms of production advocated by the occupation movement. See introduction, Stephen Lowe, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 5-6.

¹³ For a brief, though informative, discussion of socialist disillusionment with both Russian Communism and Social Fabianism, see Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope*, (London, Verso, 1989), p. 66-69.

down...were talking unions...if we band together we can bargain.
(*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act 2/3*)

But by inserting a more radical syndicalist position - a view put by Owen - the play refuted both models, and argued that all extant hierarchical structures be dismantled, the means of production re-occupied:

Owen: let's band together not to bargain but to own...if we go into their game, if we enter their House of Parliament on the back of the unions, they'll just buy us off. We got to hold out for the works...we've got to tear [capitalism] out by the roots, and build a new world. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act 2/3-4*)

Having established the politics of the play, the drama continued to reinforce Joint Stock's concurrence with occupationist theory in one short speech in which a worker deconstructed the binary opposition of manual work and intellectual labour:

The men work with their hands, the masters with their brains. That's been drummed into me so much I can't see what's at the end of me fingers...Your work in't made wi your hands, it's made with your brains, planning thinking all the time. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act 2/1*)

The companies critique of specialisation was then expanded to deconstruct the cultural opposition art/work, artist/worker when Lowe challenged the audience with a scene in which a worker - Owen - is seen sketching, designing; a worker independently engaged in the working out of large and intricate interior design problems:

Pick out the window...let's the light in. light. Sky beyond a pattern across the walls and ceiling. Same basic pattern but twisting and turning through a cycle. Developing as it goes...like sitting in a room full of music. (*Ragged Trousered Philanthropists Act1/4*)

Syndicalist criticism of the industrial work-world was made present in *Weapons of Happiness*, when, again, workers were shown separated from the owners of

the means of production, management, and trade-union bureaucrats. Work was shown to be an extension of the education system. Janice states 'Just like school, work. Never know you'd left the bloody playground' (*Weapons of Happiness Act 1/2*). In a reworking of the *événements* the play's 'hot head...tearaway hoodlums' reach a political awakening and refuse the slow-reformism of trade union representation, 'takes years, ask your mothers and fathers', and smash up the crisp factory in which they work; a sketch which comically relayed the active politics of the *enragés* or *contestataire*. Following their 'great idea' to 'occupy the place', one worker offers they should now be living in a 'worker's paradise' after they have 'liberated the machines' (*Weapons of Happiness Act 1/9 - 2/3*).

The Demonstration presented OM politics to the audience by designing its overt utterances to comply with the contemporary assault upon the university system. Primarily syndicalist students in occupation contest the hierarchical authority of the university and reformist student union - undergraduates organise their own press conferences, call for the boycott of lectures, the occupation of buildings, and building of barricades. In particular, though, the play warned of the Western university's complicity with industrialisation through its preparation of middle-class students for the capitalist system. Aston, unsurprisingly a sociologist (one of the focal points of SI critique), argues:

as the managers, leaders and planners, controllers and mind manipulators of the post industrial age, you must de-condition obsolete moral and ideological structures from your nerve systems, replacing them by authoritarian reflexes which obliterate tendencies towards uncompetitive contemplation and compassion for weaker elements.
(*The Demonstration Act 1/4*)

In one reading, the examples so far given can be dismissed and conceptualised as merely abstracted levels of reproduction or re-presentation. Filtered through their dramatic imagery *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, *Weapons of Happiness*, and *The Demonstration* merely reflected the occupations of May'68, partaking of the contemporary political currency, anti-work, anti-intellectualism, anti-authority, anti-separation, but only in a somewhat abstract mediated way. Within this system of symbolisation political theatre workers were operating in what Colin Counsell, and other theoreticians of drama, have identified as the *Abstract* locus. The dramatic sign systems and

stage gestures of the respective plays indicated an 'other-place'.¹⁴ The sets used to 'recreate' the occupied factory or yard in *Weapons of Happiness*, the building site in *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, or the university in *The Demonstration*, for example, served 'to indicate that the time/space of the performance should be regarded a separate from the ordinary social space of the audience', London circa 1976, a Hastings building site circa 1910, or, more problematically, a university under student occupation 1968. Opposed to this template of perception other approaches to theatre endeavour to operate in the *platea* register. In the *platea* the dramatist seeks to deconstruct the drama's distance from the real social space/time of the contemporary audience in order to signal that 'its views are not abstract but partisan, told by a discernible teller'.¹⁵ In this way the *platea* deals with 'the audiences everyday concerns, which could therefore be represented in their ordinary form, requiring no symbolic translation'.¹⁶ Counsell argues that in privileging one or the other, or juxtaposing them, a theatrical form can 'determine how we address what it says'.¹⁷

In the register of the *platea*, then, these plays can be reconfigured as notional dramatic pamphlets, plays which, like OM tracts, disseminated councilist theory and advertised the playwright's, or the theatre group's, sympathy with the broader ideology of the OM; theatre workers, whether writers or performers, were clearly saying this performance is a manifestation of our ideological commitment to OM-styled politics. Political theatre's shift in representational locale from the abstract to the *platea* amounts to a radical and noteworthy departure. Homological to the OM tract or poster, theatre performances were no longer about abstract occupations, reproducing the modish fashion for occupancy, but became - like a pamphlet or tract - corresponsive devices of agitation, artefacts materially striving to engineer the construction of a widespread occupation movement in Britain, imitative maybe, nevertheless evidence of drama in search of an active and partisan 'propaganda effect'.¹⁸

In fact if we return to the OM call for comrades to distribute syndicalist theory through their own forms of communication, re-turning cultural production

¹⁴ Counsell, Colin, *Signs of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.18. See also Weimann, Robert, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition: Studies in the Social Dimension of Of Dramatic Form and Function*, trans. R. Schwartz (London: Hopkins University Press, 1978).

¹⁵ Counsell, p. 20.

¹⁶ Counsell, p. 18.

¹⁷ Counsell, p. 20.

¹⁸ Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 40.

to political ends, post-'68 political theatre positioned itself alongside the sprayed wall or fly-poster as a suitable political location from which to disseminate radical councilist theory. David Edgar, for example, writing in 1978, argued that one of the most politically efficacious aspects of post-'68 political theatre - although he is talking broadly about Agit-prop - was that audiences could 'read a walking pamphlet presented theatrically'¹⁹ After all, as Viénet maintains, it was the political activities and communicative output of the *enragés* and radicals which provided the *example* followed by the factory workers.²⁰ Following the struggles of the French, the occupation of the theatre space by radicalised playwrights paralleled the activities of Sorbonne - and Hornsey - students. By taking over theatre, both as social space and elitist cultural articulation, they, too, turned their own means of production towards more communal and wider political goals, ended their own cultural separation from politics, whilst breaking the party wall which kept the intellectual dramatist away from the struggle of the proletariat. In homological terms, parallel to how Sorel sought to end the separation between abstract art or political theory and the concrete activity we see in the act of occupation, political theatre sought to end its separation from the audience by removing its sphere of signification from the abstract locus to the politically more forceful register of the *platea*.

A "How-to" Lesson in Occupation

In *Magnificence* (1973) Brenton moved away from the purely abstract to the anti-abstraction of the *platea*, by diverting his theatre, and the time/space of drama, towards a focus upon the everyday mechanics of contemporary occupation. When the audience at the Royal Court Theatre were shown a group of young housing activists breaking into an unoccupied property the scene illustrated how trouble-free real-life occupations could be achieved. The play began, for example, when offstage a voice states 'bust in just like that'. Other utterances suggested that *only* occupation can kick-start authentic revolution. Homological to the way *Mary Barnes* instructed the spectator to adopt the anti-oedipal lifestyle, *Magnificence* functioned as a how-to pamphlet advocating spatial reclamation. Representative of the hand-painted sheets or tracts hung or thrown from the occupied universities, the play's characters drape politicised banners outside the fictional occupied space. In the abstract

¹⁹ David Edgar, 'Towards a Theatre of Dynamic Ambiguities', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 33 (1979), p. 16.

²⁰ Viénet, p. 55.

locus this act was an iconic reproduction of the *événements* of May'68, but in the *platea* register it instructed the audience of the need to make contact with the wider public outside occupied areas. To educate the spectator of the necessity to enlarge fields and forms of political expression, the actors sprayed "Anarchy Farm" upon a wall of the theatre-set with aerosol cans and so promoted in the *platea*, and imitated in the abstract, the 'critical vandalism' of the Situationists (*Magnificence* Scene 1).

The playwright's application of graffiti, however, had an additional symbolic dimension. By spraying, and so defacing, the bourgeois performance space with paint, the OM play promoted the *enragé's* demand that subjects refuse the authority and sanctified space of both socialised and bourgeois private property: the abstract wall of the set stood in for the need to desecrate the wider bourgeois social landscape. Moreover, by synthesising political comment with the vandalism of the underclass, a proletarian expressive form written in toilets and waiting rooms, *Magnificence* revealed how political theory and practice, political content and form, can be unified. To put it in McLuhanian terms, by using ready-made or found means of communication, political participation can be communicated *democratically* in its formal articulation because 'the medium is the message', as such the performance event demonstrated that an anti-capitalist slogan must be homologically *anti-capitalist* in every aspect of its formal articulation.²¹ To write on a wall with aerosols, chalk, or crayons, for example, is totally anti-capitalist because the means of communication cost the political producer nothing, whilst the scripture exposes the wider population to radical intellectual socialist theory. In support of this last argument, *Magnificence* highlighted other forms of subversive, though cheap, political expression, the projection of slogans and political tracts upon the night sky, for instance. Staying within its instructive remit, when in the play handfuls of pamphlets are thrown from the inside of the occupied space to the fictional outside working class masses, this image pointed up the importance of seizing all means of communication, Xerox printing machines being a contemporary case in point, to communicate/explain occupationist theory to a wide audience - as the play and occupiers of the Sorbonne did. (see figure 1).

²¹ Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana Modern Masters, 1971), p. 12.

Anti-Stalinist Theatre: ("Down with Stalinist Dead Meat!")

British political theatre's commitment to the cold logic of the *platea* is particularly evident because post-'68 dramatists demonstrated a root and branch commitment to OM logic in tenaciously seeking to discuss *what they - the radical French - discussed. Instead of restricting their field of reference to relaying contemporary arguments, debates about the efficacy of workers' councils or establishing how one can occupy a public space, theatre workers sought to discuss political subjects identical to those the OM articulated in the material spaces they too had gained control of. Clearly reflecting the widely-held new-left politics of the period, considerable OM time and space was taken up by a sustained attack on, not only westernised free-market capitalism, but surprisingly Stalinist Communism.*

To label Situationism and the OM anti-communist might appear misguided. To begin with the SI was a leftist political organisation structured around the tenets of fundamental Marxist theory.²² Moreover, following the successes of the Soviet imperialist project, during the Cold War Marxism formed the only credible oppositional ideology to Western Capitalism. However, following the death of Stalin in 1953, his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, began a process to expose the often inhumane reign of terror practiced by Stalin's totalitarian State.²³ At first the Soviet Union looked to make good. The new regime assured the rest of Europe that it would immediately instigate a policy of de-Stalinization. The West, particularly the left, accepted this promise in good faith. But in 1956 the crisis of communism intensified when Russian tanks invaded Hungary to crush a popular uprising, crucially led by autonomous workers' soviets.²⁴ Once digested this information devastated European socialists who, on the whole, had remained loyal to the project of Russian socialism. Internationally the socialist community's faith in Soviet Communism collapsed. At French universities, for instance, Situationists denied Stalinist sympathisers floor-space to manoeuvre discussion towards their discredited ideological world-view, the term 'Stalinist' became the worst insult within extant

²² Sadie Plant, 'The Situationist Internationale: A Case of Spectacular Neglect', *Radical Philosophy*, No 55, Summer (1990), pp. 3-10. (p3) Plant points out that, although the Situationist International, established in 1957, was initially a conglomerate of radical artists and intellectuals, its main thrust was to bring 'together the Marxist and avant-garde traditions in a critique of the totality of everyday life...which transcended traditional demarcations between disciplines and at the same time developed an overt commitment to social revolution.'

²³ See Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 'State Terrorism And Rational Terror', pp. 156 -199.

²⁴ Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp.15 -23.

political discourse,²⁵ while on the streets posters and graffiti sent out the message "Down with Stalinist Dead Meat!".²⁶

Compounding communism's predicament, many on the left began to doubt that there was any qualitative difference between western free-market capitalism and Russian state-industry. As predominantly industrial societies, neither handed influence or control to those who produced modern society's material wealth, the workers. Consequently, communist parties experienced the defection of many more influential intellectuals. Demonstrating a theoretical homology with Europe's new-left, disenchanted Situationists subsequently shifted their analysis to a critique of both systems. Vaneigem wrote:

In this fractured world...only one freedom has ever been tolerated: the freedom to change the numerator, the freedom to prefer one master to another. Freedom of choice so understood has increasingly lost its attraction – especially since it became the official doctrine of the worst totalitarianisms of the modern world, East and West.²⁷

The Situationist response to this ideological impasse was to propagate an alternative politics of neither Washington nor Moscow - a structure of feeling exemplified in the widespread dissemination of the slogan "Humanity Will Only Be Happy The Day The Last Bureaucrat Is Hung With The Guts of The Last Capitalist".²⁸

In their search for theoretical synchronicity post-'68 playwrights adopted a discourse of anti-Stalinism and so inserted themselves within the communal struggle against totalitarianism. *The Demonstration*, for instance - chronologically the closest of all the OM plays to the *événements* - shared the collective disillusionment of the Western intelligentsia, and so included contemporary pessimistic references to Stalin's reign of terror. Stalin, the play notes, signed a non-aggression pact in 1939 with the German National Socialists. The audience was also reminded that, during the Spanish Civil War,

²⁵ Viénet, p. 27& 78.

²⁶ Viénet, p. 83 Workers' Councils, or Soviets, had been a thorn in the side to the pretensions of the Soviet Union since the infamous Kronstadt Revolt (1921) in which Russian sailors mutinied in support of the striking councilist workers against the Communist Party in a rebellion for better conditions and wages, a revolt which, though inevitably crushed by the Party as counter-revolutionary, began a process in which the Communist party's initial slogan "all power to the soviets" started to crumble. Indeed, cited consistently by the SI, the attack on Kronstadt became symbolic of the wider political totalitarianism of Russian Communism.

²⁷ Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, p.190.

²⁸ Viénet, p. 51.

the Communist Party was instrumental in 'the repression of the Spanish Revolution and of the international working class' (*The Demonstration Act 2/1*). Equally, *Weapons of Happiness* and *Occupations* used the space of the theatre to engage in the anti-Stalinist debate - both represented Communism as inhuman, and a variant, even harsh, form of bourgeois capitalism. Brenton's drama attacked Stalinism through the 'ghost' of the Czechoslovakian communist, Josef Frank. *Weapons of Happiness* showed that, having forced Frank to confess to treason against the Soviet Union - a crime the play established he did not commit - Stalin had Frank executed. To remind the audience of Stalin's terror, Frank returns to England, a spectre, haunting the political landscape, and, importantly, the political consciousness of the stubborn Stalinised spectator. In other sections the play tells of the political optimism Soviet Communism, based upon the power of workers' councils, promised to deliver. Initially informing them that in 1947 the Czech Communist party travelled to meet Stalinist Communists for the organised exchange of Russian grain for Czech steel - a deal arranged to prevent the death of thousands of Czechoslovakians (fellow communists) - Brenton showed the audience images of Russian intransigence and a style of hard bargaining normally associated with free market capitalism. Frank cries out, 'he shouted and scoffed at me. He was Soviet Minister of Trade. It was his duty to get the most advantageous terms possible...This Brutality...Don't they know we love this country?' (*Weapons of Happiness Act 1/7*).

Griffiths' *Occupations* undermined the spectators' identification with the communist and communism by showing that, after the collapse of the Turin occupations - an event which had parallels with the collapse of the May'68 student movement - both the Soviet Union and the Italian capitalists, took a negative view of workers' councils seizing the means of production in Italy.²⁹ Instead, *Occupations* introduced a tableau in which the Communist Kabak conducts Russian business with the owner of the Fiat car factories - the workplaces the workers' councils, led by the syndicalist Antonio Gramsci, had, for a brief period, occupied:

Valetta: What would happen if we wanted, say, for example, to set up a Fiat enterprise in Russia?

²⁹ *Occupations* describes the collaboration between capitalism, state capitalism, and the Communist Party, in both 1920 and 1968.

Kabak: You'll find it clearly taken up in the portfolio. The decrees sets it all out, I think: remuneration, exporting rights, agreed propositions to host state. It's all there.

Valletta: What about duration?

Kabak: Long enough to ensure an adequate return on investment. In addition, a cast iron guarantee against nationalisation or confiscation.

Valetta: ...and labour

Kabak: You have nothing to fear from it, Signor Valletta. It's all in the portfolio of course, but after the events of the last few months in Italy, I fancy you would find labour relations in our country a distinctly welcome change. (*Occupations Act 2/3*)

Post'68, then, plays that occupied the theatre space were no longer about the Occupation Movement but occupationist situations *in-themselves*. Within their own space and time dramas presented factual material and debates about authentic material realities, debates which circulated in the May'68 milieu and underpinned occupationism *per se*. By homology we can say that - like the occupied art college or university - the playwright sought to reclaim the physically separated space of theatre for serious contemporary political discussions, ending theatre's abstraction and separation from current intellectual activity and other radical social movements.

The critique of Stalinism and Capitalism evident in *Occupations* is significant from another symptomatic perspective. By presenting the audience with a theoretically confusing situation - one within which forms of political representation hitherto culturally coded as binary opposites are in agreement - Griffiths flagged a requirement that radicals transform theatre space into a site which can, and must, *question* all accepted forms of received political representation. This is a crucial point, for political theatre was no longer striving to reproduce the debates of the OM, but, through root and branch reform, indicating it wanted to *replicate* the open style of debate the Occupation Movement endorsed. Post-'68 political playwrights realised that, homological to factory and university occupations, and central to the political logic of occupation, it is what one *does* with the retaken space that is of material importance. During sit-ins at the occupied Sorbonne, for example, aggressive political discussion, particularly intellectual dissension, was actively encouraged. (see figure 2). On an abstract plane *The Demonstration* showed the audience images of students 'questioning', rather than passively

consuming, the hierarchical authority of their tutors and political leaders. Caute's fictional scenario highlighted that, rather than organising symbolic sit-ins in occupied public spaces, one must harness their potential *use value* by instigating probing political debate. To put plays on *about* occupations, or anti-Stalinism, purely reflecting an external removed reality, was not the same as *taking control* of a public space, remodelling it in the image of a truly occupied building (turning it into a potential political field of discussion), and therefore *being* the Occupation Movement. In vigorously *being* the Occupation Movement, post-'68 socialist political theatre was subverted, re-occupied, by an alternative, neither Washington nor Moscow ideology, a questioning and antagonistic diverse political discourse. Questioning announced the occurrence of a syndicalist culture because it pushed the spectator away from any obdurate acceptance of political or ideological authority, directing him/her to adopt an overtly interrogative approach to political organs, bureaucratic representations, and theoretical dogma.

If left-wing theatre had, up until May'68, unquestionably supported the Stalinist project, as the university professors and sociologists were accused of during May'68 (Althusser and Alain Touraine are just two examples), this new probing drama encapsulated theatre-as-syndicate because it sided *against* its own institutionalised languid acceptance of one form of socialism; a socialism no longer deemed in opposition to capitalism. Politically homologous to the struggles articulated within the Sorbonne, in eschewing one-dimensional political leaders or bureaucrats, political theatre was beginning to *question* all forms of received totalitarian political structures. Moreover, if questioning became *the* most radical political gesture, rather than faithfully supporting a party line or writing political dramas about politics, this is because the former is *active* the latter *passive*. Equivalent to the Paris occupations, then, the post-'68 model looked to reconfigure theatre spaces such that, within the remit of their time and space, an atmosphere of ideological freedom could prevail; a reshaped theatre that facilitated open discussion, and facilitated what René Viénet's book, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement (1968)*, identifies as the recognised desire for 'free discussion on a permanent basis'.³⁰

In contrast to totalitarian States, or politics, for example, the OM created *non-repressive spaces*. Characterised by their commitment to 'completely free expression' buildings transformed into open meeting places expressed the taste

³⁰ Viénet, p. 50.

for real community and engagement with the common struggle'.³¹ At the Sorbonne and Odeon theatre, *enragés* actively promoted chaotic freestyle forums in which heterogeneous political dialogue and theoretical contestation were positively encouraged. A multitude of ideological positions - excepting Stalinist theory - were given open access to, and existential parity upon, reclaimed political platforms. Starkly different from totalitarian and repressive political administrations, throughout the *événements* 'The posters of all tendencies, including Maoists, shared the walls without being torn down or defaced'.³² (see figure 5). On the British political scene this non-dogmatic approach to left-wing theory can be noticed on the Grosvenor Square Demonstration. Marked out by its 'refusal to adhere to one theoretical line',³³ flags supporting the Viet-cong NLA and its leader Ho Chi Minh, banners featuring images of Guevara, Trotsky, Marx, and Lenin, rubbed alongside Maoist slogans and those of the White Panthers - the British wing of the SI. (see figure 4).

Seeking to unify its own struggles with those of the OM, and wanting to be concomitant with the heterogeneity of the hip political demonstration, political playwrights included a polyvalent array of theoretical and political factions within their political theatre. To begin with *Magnificence* articulated recognisable tenets of Situationist theory, Jed rejects orthodox political activity for violent intervention, 'the politics of gesture' (*Magnificence* Scene 6). But contemporary Situationist ideology had to stand shoulder to shoulder with more traditional orthodox leftist 'consciousness raising', the reformist socialism Situationists rejected. One overt utterance pointed out that, although it may have become unfashionable, intellectual socialism remained a style of politicking 'with and for the people. Politicizing them and learning from them' (*Magnificence* Scene 7). The 'tune in, and drop out' principles of the counter-culture were filtered through Will. Refuting Situationist violence his more personal style of revolt involves stashing 'substances and dream machines under the floorboards' (*Magnificence* Scene 6). *Destiny* went arguably further than *Magnificence* in its political inclusiveness. The performance included Conservatives, Labourites, Left-wing militants, Communists, Nationalists, Liberals, Stalinists, Leninists, Trotskyites, Anarchists, and counter-culture radicals. Revolutionary pluralism featured exceptionally strongly in *The Party*. The piece included Greaseball *the*

³¹ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 226.

³² Viénet, p. 46.

³³ Williams, *Resources of Hope*, p. 61.

anarchist; Susie the Middle-Class revolutionary; 'Flash Ford' the New-Left Review figure; Tagg the Trotskyite; Louis the American-Black-power radical, etc. *The Demonstration* articulated the politics of anti-university hippies, the working-class, Situationists, New-left radicals, *enragés*, the March 22nd Movement, South American Peasants, Che-Guevarian guerrillas, student peaceniks, university Deans, and 'Negro militants'. Given the insistence of these clusters, we can say that, faithful to the new-model pluralism, post-'68, political theatre evidenced a rigid anti-totalitarianism in its diverse arrangement of contemporary philosophical positions, in order to *be anti-totalitarian*. For if Stalinist totalitarianism - a dogma Albert Camus identified as 'authoritarian socialism' - can only exist by crushing dissent, committing polyvalent political theories and freedom of speech to the Gulag, post-'68 political theatre positively endorsed access and dissent in another anti-Stalinist gesture.³⁴

If we view ideological plurality through a different social paradigm, political multiplicity extrapolated a syndicalist logic because behind political theatre's 'democracy of tendencies' lay the ideal of the collective. Edgar, for example, in refusing the old-style one-dimensional party-line argued that, post'68, political theatre be reformed as an ideological collective - drawing upon a diversity of historical figures - rather than remain theoretically autocratic. 'We get sustenance' he says 'from Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci, Mao Tse Tung, and so on.'³⁵ In homological terms this comment is significant because theatre workers and playwrights had moved away from drama about collectives or syndicalism to *being anti-totalitarian and being collective*. Syndicalist politicking was no longer a re-orientation of OM ideas, but woven within the formal fabric of their political gestures of inclusiveness. If the OM looked to the end of all separations, here, political theatre was deconstructing the barriers between divided political sects or philosophies. Building upon the logic of the collective we can talk about the theatre worker's symbolic refusal to *own* political theory. If these theories were tools of analysis - literary means of production - these instruments became shared, borrowed, and lent from other traditions to assist the political task in hand. Political theatre workers were making a new more dynamic and inclusive political product, one they hoped would challenge all existent forms of State power.³⁶

³⁴ Camus, p. 184.

³⁵ David Edgar, 'Towards a Theatre of Dynamic Ambiguities', p. 20.

³⁶ This syndicalist anti-totalitarianism is transposed in these plays to also embrace an anti-totalitarian aesthetics. The playwright's use of slide projections, photographs, film archive, archetypal cartoon figures, music, popular and political songs, dancing, children's games,

“The [political] difference in style to which Viénet here refers, is here obvious”

A side-effect of cooperative gestures of access, however, was that by putting heterogeneous oppositional dispositions side by side, theoretical parity broke the spectator's political identifications/belief strategies. To structure the argument differently, if in their diversity these socialisms all claimed to represent the proletarian struggle, each not only negated the other, but signalled that, perhaps, the proletariat could no longer be classified as a singular political *totality*. A case in point is *Weapons of Happiness*. When Brenton presented a group of proletarian workers 'the children of the revolution', they were noticeable for their ideological *disunity* (*Weapons of Happiness Act 1/2*). *Destiny* questioned the universality of the proletariat when it showed workers in support of far-right politics (*Destiny Act 3/1*). The clashing together of ideological dissonance is evident in other plays, too. One inevitable example is the contradictory socio-political position Gramsci enunciates in *Occupations*. Initially he allows intellectual dissent, openly debating with the workers, encouraging them to take control of the meeting and space. In one speech Gramsci says 'We will run the factories. We'll name them 'soviets' and continue production ourselves. That's what the factory councils are for, in the long run' (*Occupations Act 1/2*). Yet later he articulates the alternative proposition that accessibility and non-dogmatic intellectualism has let in the very reformism that syndicalists and Marxists historically oppose. In fact, *Occupations* ultimately suggested that an organised and ruthless Communist Party might be the only answer to bring about revolutionary international socialism.

But the theoretical confusion that Griffiths articulated through Gramsci, *Occupations*, as well as other post-'68 political drama. The forcing together of antagonistic political opinion, was tenaciously designed to engender ideological *incoherence*. Incoherence was desirable for the reason that, if, broadly speaking, pre-'68 politicking adhered to an ordered and closed structure, appointed union bureaucrats or party apparatchiks imparted political guidance to the passive political masses, by

direct audience address, asides, political tracts, bedroom farce, ghost stories, historical flashbacks, allegory, parody, pastiche, banners, political slogans, political meetings, sound effects, physical theatre, ensemble playing, TV and Radio broadcasts, symbolism, expressionism, Shakespearian scenes, Brechtian and Pirandellian theatre, simply reflects a thoroughgoing *homological* anti-totalitarian political art

contrast OM theatre was defiantly *open* and *disordered*.³⁷ In brief, it moved away from ordered debate and discussion to a form of anarchic political assembly homologous to the illogical unstructured meetings of the OM, for like the Paris students, post-'68 political drama was disordered, chaotic, confusing, paradoxical, self-contradictory, and theoretically *messy*.

To understand what kind of radical gesture informed the dramatists' messiness, we must return to the Mick Farren's assertion that the style or form of revolutionary protest can become more threatening than content.³⁸ The *enragés*, for example, were threatening to bourgeois intellectuals because, unlike the tidy and short-haired 'intellectual' Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Viénet and his group wore leather jackets, appeared physically untidy, and often unshaven. In terms of appearance, they were closer to manual workers, even street hoodlums, than the serious and ordered neat political leader. But their idiosyncratic unruly and mismatched style of dress reflected their unkempt form of politics. Such a claim might seem a rather speculative leap. Yet in his book about *enragés*, René Viénet's editor reaches the same conclusion. Drawing a parallel between the political style and social apparel of the *enragé* René Riesel with that of the 'media spokesman' Cohn-Bendit, he remarks "the [political] difference in style, to which Viénet refers, is here obvious".³⁹ That is, Riesel's disordered dress reflected his anarchic theoretical style, while Cohn-Bendit's orthodox betrayed his conventional bourgeois politics. (see figure 8). Viénet argues that Cohn-Bendit inevitably became 'the leader' of the OM because his rational style of coherent political debate fitted extant codes of representation and discourse proper. Although, at the same time, Cohn-Bendit betrayed ignorance of the significance of the revolutionary anarchic *gestural* nature of the movement, that is, the leader of the March 22nd Movement communicated what bourgeois socialist society wanted in bourgeois acceptable forms, whereas bona-fide activists in the Occupation Movement lived the politics of anarchical protest by communicating in un-acceptable forms, *being* anarchic, rather than just talking about anarchy.

Structural coincidence with *enragé*-style demanded that the political theatre space be refashioned to politically support the struggles inherent within *enragé*

³⁷ Edgar says that this is so because as artists playwrights have a duty to be open to 'complexity' for if the left is to maintain its political credibility it needs to be seen to be an 'open self-critical movement'. Open debate he insists is crucial and artists in particular have the means of communication to 'confront the debate in a way that conventional politics can't. A modern open and critical theatre realises that things are no longer so simplistic'. Edgar, 'Dynamic', p. 21.

³⁸ Mick Farren, *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 68.

³⁹ Viénet, p. 31.

chic: it became ideologically messy, chaotic, and broken up. If accomplished, new forms of activity and relationships could be reinstated in a space which would no longer represent the residues or traces of what the Situationists called the 'old world', a style of existence epitomised by Cohn-Bendit's clothes.

Destiny exemplified untidy theatre by messing around with the visual language of received revolutionary left-wing political iconography, and, its orthodox dramatic representation. The sixth scene of act one opens in the upstairs of a pub, notably in 1968. A raised platform with a picture covered in a red cloth, redolent of the red flag of socialism, dominated the stage settings. Two characters entered the scene and, after suggesting that the situation 'is looking good' - they appeared to be discussing the revolutionary gains of the anti-Stalinist May'68 leftists - Drumont says 'Whole world over. Detroit to Grovesnor square. Particularly here. The sell out blatant. Deeper rot. Unthinkable ideas being thought. What an opportunity' (*Destiny* Act 1/6). The presence of leftist discourse was invoked once again when Drumont addresses the young audience seated casually upon the floor, as 'comrades', and, in an evocation of scenes from any occupied university, tells them, 'It's nineteen hundred and sixty eight. Student riots. Workers striking. Chaos and decay. In ten tears time, where could you be? I tell you. Out of the cellars...out of the basements and into the sun' (*Destiny* Act 1/6). But the scene was not about celebrating the *événements*, it unravelled as a celebration of Hitler's birthday. The Red cloth was not concealing a picture of Mao or Ho Chi Minh, but the fascist dictator. The messiness here warned that socialism and fascism are closer in appearance and ideological coherence than some might believe, hence *Destiny* featured Trotskyite racists.

The clusters of theoretical messiness we see in post'68 theatre, therefore, were a consequence of *enragé* style synthesised into the chic stylistic gestures of political theatre - in distinguishing itself from orthodox tidy politics through its disorganized style it defiantly sought to no longer *look* like a reliable *straight* political theatre. Partaking of the contemporary ethos, it became a fashionably disordered artefact, a political creation that refused to look like the model political leader Cohn-Bendit, because - homological to the OM's claim to be a self-styled 'leaderless movements' - post-'68 political drama refused, like Riesel, to *be* a leader, too.⁴⁰ This was an important tactic for if post-'68 playwrights declined the role of political leadership, by homology, such a refusal

⁴⁰ Viénet, p. 30.

implied that the spectator, like the autonomous radical, had to do the political leg-work for themselves.

If we return to Sorel, the playwright's refusal to enforce autocratic leadership - control the means of intellectual production - was comparable to the syndicalist's call for the worker to refuse to be distanced culturally, physically, and functionally from intellectual work. Continuing within OM thematics we can proffer that leaderless and politically confusing performances like *Destiny*, *Magnificence*, and *Occupations* were dramatic means to a councilist end: the forging of a new radical intellectual autonomy, a kind of political self-management, within the being of the passive political spectator. At the same time, strikingly similar to Griffiths' claim that Gramsci was embraced by the workers because of his physical and theoretical untidiness (in *Occupations* Gramsci's theoretical dishevelment is homological to his physical unkemptness, a scruffiness workers loved in comparison to the tidiness of the union bureaucrat, Terraccini, despised for his 'bourgeois correctness'),⁴¹ political playwrights decreased their own intellectual distance from the proletariat by becoming politically dishevelled like the proletarian factory workers and their chaotic, but democratic, meetings.⁴²

More crucially, this messy chaotic theatre was a political gesture in that it had shifted away from a focus upon what it talked about, anti-totalitarianism, say, to *how* it spoke about that subject. Put slightly differently, if an occupationist theatre wanted more dynamic anarchic politics the demand for it became ideologically inseparable from *how* it said it. Homological to the chaotic Sorbonne halls, or the occupied streets of Paris, then, the floor of the theatre was left open, ideas had to be worked at and forged in discussion and dialectical labour, perhaps in a more collective or communal way. Theatre was no longer a space for passive political consumption, but a kind of potential *intellectual factory*. The stress was put on political production, self-sufficient creation, and the construction of new independent political modes of operation; the theatre a new workplace offering a new kind of work. The raw materials for

⁴¹ Trevor Griffiths, *Trevor Griffiths: Plays 1* (London: faber and faber, 1996), p.8.

⁴² Again, this comparison between theatre and soviets sounds like a theoretical flight of fancy. But Orlando Figes points out that in contrast to the ordered bourgeois leaders who eventually took over the mechanics of Soviet government, the original workers' soviets were 'chaotic, but creative and exciting'. By contrast when workers' assemblies became organised along more bourgeois 'bureaucratic' lines, any tangible evidence of their participation dissipated as 'the soviet's bureaucratisation...set them apart from the lives of the ordinary workers'. See Figes, . p. 458.

this work were the multiple ideas and disparate political theories found within the plays themselves, the audience would be the workers.

Inside - Outside: Theatre Occupied by the Factory

A reconfiguration of the theatre as a factory is a very useful structural homology. To begin with it underlines the OM dramatist's attempt to undermine the conceptual firewall that exists between the theatre as an indolent art space and the workplace as an isolated sphere of work. Away from conventional theatre space and drama, political theatre groups such as Foco Novo took theatre to the factory gate.⁴³ As we have noted, Joint Stock sought to bridge the work/art/theatre hiatus in their building-site performance of *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. But recognisably conventional drama, looked to traverse this separation too. Operating in the abstract code, in *Occupations* Gramsci addresses the Fiat factory workers in occupation 'perhaps I should begin by thanking the owners for the use of the hall (*Laughter*). I mean it comrades. I mean you. You are the owners now. And you must never forget it' (*Occupations Act1/3*). But in the code of the *platea* Gramsci's address was directed at the Manchester theatre audience. The theatre was *the* factory and the occupied factory the theatre, hence Gramsci's rhetoric implied that the audience takeover *this* intellectual space, and in controlling the means of communication, manage - like the soviets - theatre's intellectual output for their own ends. Gramsci says:

Despite difficulties of materials, supply, transportation, capital markets for finished products, and the defection of technical support, we continue to produce. Our first great lesson, comrades: we are learning how to become producers, active, vital controlling, instead of mere consumers, passive, inert, controlled. (*Occupations Act1/3*)

The concept of the theatre as a new kind of factory, adopting a certain factoriness in its active targeted production of intellectual work, has other implications. In making plays about workers' cooperatives the playwright had taken control of the bourgeois means of cultural production - in stark contrast to theatre workers who operate within the commercial sector, producing sellable

⁴³ For a broad exposition of the work of Foco Novo see Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 136-8, 163, 261-3. Also see Roland Rees, *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre*, (London: Oberon Books, 1992)

aesthetic goods to please the demands of the mass market, while making profit for the owners and managers of this theatre. Gramsci's speech about defection, lack of technical support and 'capital markets' was, in fact, a reference to the industrial aspects of theatre. Through Gramsci Griffiths asserted that, like Hornsey or The Beaux-Arts, bourgeois theatre's means of artistic production should be steered towards a socialist, collective use. As art factory, its products must have - like the soviets - a productive utility or communal use value.⁴⁴

In *Powerplays*, for instance, Mike Poole and John Wyver note that during the 70s, though still at the Old Vic, the National became a new space for the political writer to 'occupy', and since it was the pinnacle of the traditional English theatre, a production there - although they are talking here of the 1973 production of *The Party* - marked the fullest achievement of Griffiths' cultural entryism, an entryism structurally equivalent to the factory seizures *Occupations* described.⁴⁵ Similarly, *Weapons of Happiness*, the first of the new plays to be performed at the National Theatre's new South Bank Complex as the inaugural production of the Lyttleton Theatre, established Brenton's own occupation of a cultural, though industrial, site of struggle. And although the motivation of Griffiths, Brenton, Edgar, and Hare in seeking the main-house stages of the National and the RSC was largely pragmatic, 'given the failure of the Fringe to establish a genuinely popular socialist theatre', in political terms they set out to 'wrest the ideological initiative from the Becketts, the Stoppards, the Pinters, and the Ayckbourns, seen collectively as the [apolitical] high priests of bourgeois theatre' production.⁴⁶

However, what the factory-in-the-theatre strategy indicated above all was the cultural distance that remained between the workplace and theatre. As a response political playwrights set about demolishing this socio-cultural barrier by symbolically bringing the world of work, the factory, back within the removed world of the theatre. In a very simple way *Destiny* achieved cultural importation by inserting an abstract foundry worker into the performance event, a gesture which echoed the invitation extended to workers to crossover into the university space by the OM. Edgar supplemented his figurative placement of the worker, by invading the protected area of the theatre with the recorded clatter and dirt of the workspace. Dressed in the blackened protective clothing of a foundryman - dust mask, goggles and ear defenders - actors shouted over the sound of

⁴⁴ See, G.V. Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart)

⁴⁵ Mike Poole and John, Wyver, *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television* (London: BFI Books, 1984), p. 57.

⁴⁶ Richard Boon, *Brenton The Playwright*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. 118.

running machinery to be heard (*Destiny Act 2/2*). Similarly, segments in *Occupations* included the loud hum and reverberation of heavy factory machinery or the bravado and comradeship heard at workers' meetings. In other gestures of emblematic solidarity projected slides of the Turin occupations movement portrayed Italian workers defending occupied factory gates. Indeed Griffiths was clear about what he wanted to achieve: *The Theatre is now the factory; the audience, the workers* (*Occupations Act 1/3*).

The cultural exchange Griffiths formalised here, albeit apparently figurative, only takes on its potential force if we consider Baz Kershaw's reconfiguration of Bourdieu's observation that, historically, industrial workers, more familiar with the auditory and visual landscape of the industrial field of production - the factory or workshop - experience bourgeois theatre as an alien environment. This is because, theatre buildings have a restrictive or repressive function which channels and bars access to those from without its cultural field. Therefore a theatre building, like the university, despite the admirable intentions of middle-class dissidents, is *never* a democratic institution, but rather a social institution which has 'mechanisms of exclusion that ensure that most people stay away'.⁴⁷ Bringing the factory within the theatre *inter alia* the playwright sought to instigate a symbolic rapprochement between intellectual, artist, and worker, and their spatial fields. Already we have observed that a crucial element of May'68 theory and councilist gesturing was the intention to end *all* social and cultural separations. In plays like *Occupations*, *Weapons of Happiness*, and *Destiny* leftist revolutionaries could vicariously, and in comfort, inhabit the world of the worker; the factory experienced and entered within the field of the drama. Remaining in spatial vocabulary we can think of a certain closeness of proximity, a tentative confluence or coincidence of fields of hitherto diametrically opposed environmental areas inhabited by diverse social classes. Admitting the problems of the worker into its own sphere of concern - the introduction of industrial conflict and contact with the hierarchies of industrial power - drama engaged with the external proletarian struggle inside the theatre. But, of course, this theatre was *not* the factory, and this was the playwright's central point. These strategies of coincidence did not speak of structural closeness, or political unity, but exposed the bourgeois spectator's

⁴⁷ Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance, Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 31.

physical, cultural, and functional *detachment* from proletariat life.⁴⁸ Far from the classless dreams of the OM a synthesis of factory and theatre proved that much of the audience, especially those on the left, remained resolutely residual bourgeois subjects. Griffiths' factory-in-the-theatre reversal of perspective was not arranged to build new-communities or collectives, but to attack bourgeois theatre's political and socio-cultural spatial aloofness. In fact, by making the theatre an alien environment, the drama reversed Kershaw's proposition by making the bourgeois spectator uncomfortable in the factory. This is why Tagg says to the audience 'well which workers have you spoken with recently? And for how long?' (*The Party Act 2/2*).

The Night of the Barricades

Contrasting with drama about work, *The Party* developed a critique of separation in a different, though related way, when Griffiths drove the confrontation with clean-handed socialist intellectuals from the work place towards the terrain of political commitment. Throughout *The Party* middle-class members of the audience were interrogated on the subject of their ambivalent relationship to working-class revolutionary activity *per se*. An excellent snapshot of the confrontational nature of the performance can be seen in the 'night of the barricades' segment, a short set-piece in which TV footage of May 10 1968 changed the sterile nature of the theatre space with a depiction of a riot-strewn Parisian street-scene. For in resituating the audience as passive spectators of the students and workers fighting riot police in the bloody battle to hold the occupied Sorbonne, the form of the performance blatantly implicated the audience's abstract absence from tangible revolutionary events as they 'sat' 'watching' the action. Removed from real political struggle, identical to the abstract political and cultural activists they had observed in *The Party*, audiences became *spectators of revolution*, the *événements* experienced from the safe 'symbolic' distance of a TV screen or theatre space. (see chapter 5 'Society of the Spectacle' for a fuller discussion of political spectatorship).

The night of the barricades had further significance in that, as a formal stratagem, it undermined the claim of political theatre to material political engagement - as a 'political drama' *The Party* drew attention to its own

⁴⁸ Viénet points out that despite the desire to open up the Sorbonne as a free democratic space, 'in fact, few workers actually came to the Sorbonne. But because the Sorbonne had been declared open to the populace the lines between the "student problem" and a concerned public had been broken'. Viénet, p. 46.

abstraction from everyday radical activity. *The Demonstration* signalled a concomitant self-conscious realisation of the dichotomous nature of what goes on outside theatre and its simulated representation inside. In Caute's play, for instance, rather than *being there*, a film screen provided a projected image of Trafalgar Square and replayed the anti-war protests of the late sixties. A radical student says to Bright, 'why don't you come with us to Trafalgar Square this afternoon? Get the smell of grease-paint out of your lungs.' Until 'pulling a lever' Bright revealed a representation of Trafalgar Square, replying 'It's perfectly possible, you know, to march to Trafalgar Square without ever stepping outside this theatre' (*The Demonstration* Act1/8).

Post-'68 playwright's used other forms - apart from audible and visual recorded revolutionary activity - to highlight the political isolationism of bourgeois theatre. For example, *Occupations*, at first glance, appeared to be a traditional bourgeois political play 'about' politics, it used a recognisable naturalistic form, and relayed the political events which surrounded the Turin occupations. However, with an exploratory synthesis of abstract *and platea*, Griffiths transposed the political play into a notional facsimile of a soviet assembly or socialist meeting. For instance, the performance began with a tape playing *The Internationale* sung by a Soviet-Union male choir, as the music intensified, out of the darkness a large bright red recruitment poster was projected onto the back wall of the stage. In bold Russian typeface the text demanded, "Have You Enrolled As A Volunteer Yet", an image quickly replaced by the modernist Lizitsky's abstract design of an angular red wedge figuratively dividing a white profile. (see figure 10). Under the graphic a slogan read "With The Red Wedge Divide The Whites", whilst the excited hubbub of a Soviet communist conference faded up and then faded down. Indicative of a political meeting, the voice of a Russian-Bolshevik then addressed the audience:

Comrade delegates to the Second Congress of the Third International;
Lenin's promise is being fulfilled before your eyes. Denkin's treacherous hordes in the south have been quelled. Now it is the turn of Marshal Pilduski and his reactionary Polish divisions to feel the bite of our revolutionary anger. Comrade Trotsky sends apologies for his absence - he is taking a short holiday in Poland, in the company of generals Tuchachevsky and Buddeny and a few thousand comrades of the Red Army...(Occupations Act1/1)

As the 'delegate' prepares to round up his speech the revolutionary tableau ended with the *Internationale* superimposed over 'Comrade delegates, Europe is little more than dry couch-grass and kindling, waiting for a spark. Waiting for you, Comrades' (*Occupations Act 1/1*). At other intersections Antonio Gramsci addressed the audience framed by a large hand-painted red and black Anarchist or soviet-style banner. (see figure 7).

Whatever their general effects, behind the function of this fusion of abstract and *platea* revolutionary iconographies - 'held red and challenging' as Griffiths said they must be - was Griffiths' desire to disorientate the bourgeois spectator. For he or she found themselves figuratively transported into the sights and sounds of revolutionary Russia circa 1917, the theatre space altered as a socio-political experience into an existential situation comparable to a Russian congress of peasant deputies, say. (see figure 3). Or, equally, by introducing the colourful red, yellow, and black insignia of the May'68 demo, or the graphic images of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Guevara we see pasted on walls and doors of Paris and London (see figures 4-5-9) we can say political theatre sought to transform the performance area as *platea* into Grosvenor Square or the occupied Latin Quarter: the badges and symbols of proletarian radicalism took-over the bourgeois theatre as they did the previously apolitical metropolitan area. (compare plates: 3,4,5,6 & 7). Of course, the theatre was not the London street nor a congress of peasant deputies, and certainly never Paris May'68. And I am not arguing that the transformation of the theatre space was complete, that would be to argue homological theory into areas it cannot defend. But these radical gestures were structurally coincidental in that they attempted to contest a struggle within the auditorium comparable to those taking place elsewhere. What the distortion of the experience of theatre meant was that, if the street or civic hall can be commandeered for contestation of State power, and become a new space of proletarian political expression, why not the theatre? From this perspective then, the theatre wall or hall was positively reduced, therefore raised, to the same spatial and symbolic equivalence as the garage door or the pasted bus stop. Put another way, the space of the auditoria becomes neutralised, but also politicised.

Furthermore, if theatre continued to refuse admission to forms of proletarian political expression, this would have been equivalent to not only maintaining the partitioning-off of bourgeois theatre (elitist art) from wider political life (the struggle of the proletariat), but keeping proletarian political art out of bourgeois art about politics. Whereas the reintroduction of working-class

political art into orthodox political theatre added a vital social dynamic to the sphere of political, spatial and cultural contestation. Juxtaposed *against* bourgeois political aesthetics - the naturalistic political plays represented in sections of *The Party* and *Occupations* for example - proletarian expressions lifted from the workers' struggle emphasized the political shortcomings of bourgeois theatre's own fields of political articulation. In contrast to workers' meetings, strikes, communal singing, or street demonstrations, orthodox political theatre demands that those in attendance experience the event in passive silence. Removed from the action spectators of political theatre, even though the play may range over socialist issues about 'community' etc, paradoxically sit rooted in personal isolation, habitually failing to establish contact with even those sat next to them. Different to large demonstrations or a workers' congress, theatre audiences regularly amount to no more than a few hundred. With discussion or interruption of the drama forbidden, unlike the general assemblies of the OM, spectators are prohibited culturally from breaking into the performance with personal or political interjections. Meanings or decisions are not arrived at collectively but through individual and private contemplation, or submission to authorial instruction.

But homologous to the way the *événements* usurped the bourgeois theoretical text or organised political meeting, post'68, the time had come for political theatre to supplant an art concerned with politics, with a more *political form of art*. The slide of a red wedge driving out the whites in *Occupations*, in reality, referred to the 'red art' of the proletariat driving out the 'white art' of the bourgeoisie, rather than referring to the action which took place in the abstract play about Gramsci or the Turin occupations. In fact, by retaking the cultural space of bourgeois political theatre with the aesthetics of working class politics, the playwright advocated the need for intellectual, political, and practical participation, period. If, as Sorel maintained, intellectuals colonised the sphere and form of political expression, here the proletariat was reinstated into the political arena, via a homological alliance with their political art. Under pressure from the anti-elitist and anti-divisional conditions of a unifying syndicalism, political playwrights accordingly stepped forward, and conflated politics with the *politicisation of political aesthetics*.

At a more fundamental level, however, the logic of the red wedge flagged radical theatre's attempt to reinsert a more vibrant, energetic, and authentic political art into a monochrome political theatre, for other political ends. As we have noted and Orlando Figes has observed, the original workers' movement in

Russia, though often disorganised and chaotic (hence the messy anarchic stratagem outlined above), were bright, colourful, creative and exciting affairs. At street meetings the pre-revolutionary scene was dominated by huge red flags, marching workers, banners, songs and the wearing of communist party armbands.⁴⁹ By contrast when workers' assemblies became organised along bourgeois 'bureaucratic' lines, any substantial evidence of worker participation dissipated as the dry and turgid soviet bureaucratisation set them apart from the lives of the ordinary workers.⁵⁰ Similarly, we can say that the supplanting of proletarian political art by bourgeois art about politics, indicated a parallel domination. Hence the OM's wish to reverse this trend by a return to historically active, rather than theoretically passive, political forms. Viénet's claim that the originality of May'68 was that it marked 'the return of the social revolution'⁵¹ can consequently be glimpsed in the resuscitation of the iconography of the mass workers' struggle by the OM and political theatre, and their synchronic rejection of bourgeois political intellectualism.

To be more specific, when *Occupations* collided red-art, the proletarian code, with white-art, bourgeois naturalism, Griffiths moved class conflict onto the terrain of literary aesthetics and political culture. The playwright's interference with the wordy inactive aesthetics of naturalism was synchronic with the radical's attack on bourgeois political hegemony, because, as a received dramatic form, verbose literary naturalism reinforced the preferred style of 'abstract' politicking of that class, whilst the projected iconography of soviets represented the return of proletarian power. Take for instance this short extract of text which formed a long and dry speech delivered by Ford:

So, we need a new model, perhaps a new concept. The Marxian notion of a revolution carried by the majority of the exploited masses, culminating in the seizure of power and in the setting up of a proletarian dictatorship which initiates socialisation, is overtaken by historical development. I would even argue that Marx himself would now see that that analysis pertains to a stage of capitalist productivity and organisation which has been overtaken; it does not project the higher stage of a capitalist productivity self-evidently achieved in the last half-century, including the productivity of destruction and the terrifying

⁴⁹ Figes, p. 188 & 192.

⁵⁰ Figes, pp. 458 - 459,

⁵¹ Viénet, 'The Return of the Social Revolution', pp.11-18.

concentration of the instruments of annihilation and of indoctrination in the hands of the state or its class representatives (*The Party Act* 1/2).

In contrast to the graphic and bright revolutionary iconography of the workers' movement, although it did impart revolutionary theory and meaning (and this effect cannot be dismissed out of hand), this speech was long, tedious, and complex. Yet purposefully inserted because the performance sought to draw telling parallels between the ineffectuality of old 'boring' verbose forms of politics, and the limitations of an allied text-focused politicised naturalism - which, of course, the dominant 'white' sections of this drama were. Ford's digressive style, then, conveyed in the form of naturalism, turns out to be homological to the wider benign ineffectual world of theoretical bourgeois politics Sorel disliked. By the same token, Tagg's later comment 'Your main weapon is the word your protest is verbal' but 'leads to nowhere' (*The Party Act* 1/2) was not about verbal theoretical work *per se* but naturalism. Consequently political theatre broke new territory where aesthetic forms reflected - homologically - political codes and models of communication. Hence *The Party* deployed *non-verbal* multi-media to assault the bourgeoisie by comparing their slow ineffectual aesthetics with their residual practice of literary political communication. Indeed, the slides of Lenin and Trotsky, pictures of Black-Power clenched fists, captions in French "*Violez Votre Alma Mater*", or cinema screens flashing subliminal photographs of OM activists at speed, achieved their ultimate propaganda effect by being pasted *against* an inert naturalism; a tactic homological to the way Parisian radicals destroyed street-scenes in their colourful and original protest against the broader, politically inert, dull life of European bourgeois society. Speaking more broadly, Griffiths' work represents 'a structural homology between the break-up of a dominant form of politics and the break-up of a dominant form of representation'⁵²

Ford's convoluted speech was also a form of communication which steadfastly deployed political theoretical jargon, a code of articulation used, not by the working man, but the politicised specialist or intellectual. Phrases like 'over-mechanistic views of society', 'Post-industrial society', and 'Historical material conditions' formed a recognisable, though impenetrable, style of political and cultural obfuscation. This tendency was summarised rather neatly when one piece of critical analysis offered, 'Communism as a complete

⁵² Poole and Wyver, p. 106.

naturalism is humanism, and as a complete humanism is naturalism' (*The Party Act 1/2*). By contrast, when in *The Demonstration Caute* lifted anglicised slogans from the OM such as "Blueprints Are Fatal, Just Let The Thing Develop" - 'Deal With Each Problem As It Comes Up', or as banners carried the slogans 'Boycott Exams' - 'To Be Young Is To Be Alive', the audience must have been struck by their *straightforward manner* (*The Demonstration Act 1/7*).

This directness arose because OM theoreticians/playwrights endeavoured to convey political meaning in brief exchanges of only a few words, one sentence at the most. For example, the Situationist poster "*Fin De L'Université*" - pasted around the universities and streets of Paris - used only three words, and the same square space several pages of a complicated political text might have taken, to say the same thing, including, of course, their own Strasbourg Pamphlet. (see figure 9). Moreover, pasted across the walls, doorways, shop windows, and bus stops of France the billboard planted in the minds of the general public, both overtly and subliminally, the idea "End the University" in a very graphic and straightforward way. Not only that, lifted from the film genre, the poster communicated in a cultural form understood and recognised by the proletarian masses.⁵³ For generally speaking, unlike the university lecture hall or theatre auditoria, as a cultural form, the cinema space is an area within which the social subject does not experience the 'social inertia' or self 'elimination' and 'channelling' both Bourdieu and Kershaw note maps out how humans move around in hierarchical socio-cultural space.⁵⁴ Farren's thesis on the threat working-class idioms of communication posed to orthodox society makes particular sense here because, in a certain 'reversal of perspective', political thought was being communicated in a non-threatening form to the masses, whilst, at the same time, threatening the order of things by communicating political thought in forms the masses *do understand* and accept as authentic and accessible modes of signification.

⁵³ Of course the use of cinematic idioms were also references to the idea of all forms of social praxis being a film or show, a concept developed theoretically in Debord's idea of 'the society of spectacle', (see Chapter 5).

⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 110. 'The Social Space and its Transformations'.

Comics: 'a proletarian form of graphic' - 'the only truly popular literature of our century'.

Obligation to political clarity informed the OM's resumption of the comic strip as a vital instrument of political agitation. In their search for unified theory - content, form, and practice - the SI thought it politically coherent to utilize *critical* comic strips in inventive forms of political expression.⁵⁵ In a structural coincidence with the film poster or freeze-frame image, they, too, communicated their political message in an accessible visual proletarian form. The fundamental charm of comic strips though, was that, for the OM, they represented 'the only truly popular literature of our century'.⁵⁶ By integrating their political ideas within the low culture of tabloid cartoons the SI superseded politicised white-bourgeois art and reinstated the 'red' comic-strip to its rightful place. Similarly, if OM theory was about colonising, disturbing, or subverting spaces, then by *détourning*⁵⁷ the newspaper or comic strip and inserting SI philosophy within extant speech bubbles, this supplemented other homologous act of spatial contestation, albeit on a piece of paper. Mass newspapers are, in addition, democratic, non-specialised, accessible, cheap and egalitarian. Finally, a tabloid cartoon, the *Daily Mirror's* Andy Capp is a case in point, conveys a story, meaning, or message in a three-frame tableau. As an example, examine the first-ever comic strip circulated during the *événements*:

⁵⁵ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, pp. 213, 214-248.

⁵⁶ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p.214. See also Viénet, p. 92. for examples of comic strips.

⁵⁷ See glossary: *Détournement*.

It encapsulated the syndicate politics of the OM by denouncing trade-union reformism, advocated the overthrow of the means of production, and essentially *seized* a means of communication - the newspaper comic-strip - as well as comically debunking the seriousness of reasonable 'real' 'rational' literate forms of political orthodoxy in less than five square inches, without throwing the serious political baby out with the old revolutionary bath water.

Within the circle of post-'68 political theatre, the work of Brenton provides the best example of an importation of the comic-strip strategy into the politics of drama. For example, as we have seen, *Weapons of Happiness* raised serious political questions for debate. To give a brief *précis*, factories were shown to be exploitative of the working-class, workers manipulated and mistreated by management and the union. The play demonstrated that, consistently, bureaucratic representation dissuades the proletariat from occupying the work-space. 'Socialist' union-sponsored Labour MPs represent the interests of capitalism, not the workers. Brenton showed that, in confronting the State, *pace* France May'68, the 'RSA' (The Police) and the 'ISA' (the Trade Unions) may be brought in to crush the revolt, and as such the drama referenced sober Althusserian theory.⁵⁸ Following an appeal to the reformist instruments of human reason and rationality, the revolutionary situation *Weapons of Happiness* outlines, returns to the social *Status Quo* and as such the play's *dénouement* mirrored the fall of May'68.

But the drama's action was articulated in a comic-strip format. For sure, I cannot seriously argue *Weapons of Happiness* is a cartoon or comic, but within the parameters of the performance it does display telling cartoonish formal-articulations. Indeed, from the outset Brenton - in a self-referential reference - alluded to the comic strip nature of his political creations. Criticised by their political superiors for making 'irrational' demands, it is suggested that these 'kids' should 'get back to the pages a the *Beano* where you belong' (*Weapons of Happiness* Act 1/9). Just as Leo Baxendale's anarchic Bash Street Kids - a gang of unruly boys and girls featured in the *Beano* - fought any form of authority - teachers, parents, or police - the young workers in *Weapons of Happiness* are commonly referred to as stupid adolescents, silly little boys and girls. As the 'kids' played cricket in the schoolyard - the factory backyard is the pitch - the tableau reproduced a recognisable reference to a page in the *Beano*. Chalk made the stumps and, when not picking their noses, they 'bash up' the

⁵⁸ See Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1993), pp.1-60. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'.

factory owner, have uncontrollable comic adventures 'down west', get drunk, and, in the vein of 'Rodger the Dodger' or 'Dennis The Menace', 'have a great idea', only in this case it is to 'occupy the factory', not play a trick on Headmaster. (see figure 11). Furthermore, distinct from the studied dry naturalist aspects of *Destiny*, *The Party*, or *Occupations*, the 'occupation of the factory' scene was a comic-strip comedy. In copying Baxendale's gang (In *The Beano* comic-strip adventures often ended with the Bash Street Kids fighting police with home made cannons, or thrusting cold snowballs down teachers' pants), Brenton's mob bombard the factory owner, police-officers, and trade-unionist with potatoes and bags of crisps. After deciding to abandon the factory they disappear down a drain, apparently making light of the counter-culture's alternative to 'go underground' (*Weapons of Happiness Act 2/4*).

Confronted with Brenton's anti-serious political play bourgeois critics seized upon his use of comic form, bemoaning, it 'robs him of much-needed analytical element' and accused his plays of 'discrediting' broader political theatre's 'Marxist intentions'.⁵⁹ Unlike bourgeois analytic naturalism it was cartoon theatre: superficial, brutal and one-dimensional. But such criticism immediately provides one more example of certain critics' failure to fully comprehend post-'68 political theatre's structural adherence to the crucial May'68 command to unify form and content. As cultural artefact the use of cartoon or comic strip characters unified the praxis of political theatre with the wider demands of the OM anarchists, because, heeding the '68 slogan 'Power to the Imagination', political cartoons promoted fantasy, not totalitarian rationalism.⁶⁰ If serious rationalism was synonymous with naturalism, particularly the fashionable *uber-determinist* naturalism of Beckett - the world is shown as *it is* : unmoveable and fixed - the OM playwright wrote creative plays to signal that the free creation of art is homologous to the free creation of a new, less rational, political society, and in this process shows the audience that the world can be changed⁶¹

In the cartoon *anything is possible*, a cat can be run over by a steamroller and get up again. Hence the dead Frank, a metaphor for the lost-utopia of International Soviets, is 'brought back to life' by Brenton in *Weapons of Happiness*. His preoccupation with cartoon-style became demonstrated further when, in contrast to Griffiths' perhaps semi-ironic parody of naturalism - heavy

⁵⁹ Steve Grant, 'Voicing the Protest' in Sandy Craig, ed, *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain* (Ambergate: Amber Lane Press, 1980) pp. 121-118.

⁶⁰ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, cited in Craig, p. 28.

⁶¹ Craig, p. 28. See also Sadie Plant, *Radical Philosophy*, pp. 3 -10.

symbolism in *Occupations* and *The Party* equated the unemotional Kabak and impotent Shawcross with a 'loveless' State Communism or powerless reformism - in *Weapons of Happiness à la Minnie* the Minx, Janice, seduces a cold unemotional communism with a quick grope. 'Give us a kiss' Janice says, as she 'wrestles' 'Communism' to the floor. Other jokes are played upon serious theoretical Marxist theory. The ghostly Frank is Marx's 'spectre haunting Europe'; his comment that the 'proletariat are like a sack of potatoes' is spoofed as the cartoon *enragés* throw potatoes upon the stage after occupying the crisp factory (*Weapons of Happiness* Act 1/10 -11).

Putting the communicative aspects of the comic-strip aside, cartoon-style had additional portent because, like the soviet banner or red flag, it was not a cultural form associated with those who *owned* the means of production. The OM's inclusion of the comic strip was therefore ostensibly a political act. Comic-strips announced the homological reclamation of socialist politics by presenting it *within* a proletarian form. The case can be made, then, that political and cultural representation was returned, just as the means of industrial production should be, to the working class itself - albeit vicariously. By homology the political playwright and theatre workers claimed a certain cultural solidarity by rejecting their own culture and embracing the culture of the workers.

Ultimately, if naturalism was rejected as a 'pessimistic' aesthetic which, more often than not, conceptualised the human subject, particularly the proletariat, shorn of 'free will' and 'helplessness', as Lee Baxendall suggests, the 'comification' of the theatre allowed the dramatist to present characters who display an antithetical creative *free-will*.⁶² As Leo Baxendale has remarked, as a political anarchist, Minnie the Minx's political reaction to oppression by authority was never reasoning but an advocacy of 'marmalizing' destruction. Reminiscent of the violent *enragé* ethics of the *événements*, in set comic scenes *The Beano* habitually presented its readers with 'street-battle set pieces' in which its anti-heroes took on society at large. By using the comic format, the *contestataire* playwright began to marmalize or destroy the very prestige of existent political theatre, and theatre *per se*, by communicating its ideological discourse in forms lifted from hitherto excluded fields of reference. If naturalism was considered broadsheet theatre, then the work of Brenton crossed-over into the field of the tabloid, the worker's paper.

⁶² See Lee Baxendall, 'The Revolutionary Moment', *TDR*, Vol 13, (1968), pp. 92 -107.(p. 92, 93 & 96.) Baxendall begins this essay with a treatment of Beckett's naturalism, but the article moves on to discuss broader forms of naturalism, particularly political naturalism.

Brenton's cartoon work was also radical in that, by transporting theatre into the space of kid's literature, not only did this damage the authority of serious theatre with a comic form, it possessed the potential to smash all generic codification. For though *Weapons of Happiness* may have been apparently a-political, its choice of confusing political forms *made it* political. Viewed from a different angle, concomitant with the anarchistic chaos of the amorphousness of 'messy politics', Brenton's serious-comic compositions politicised aesthetics with their formulistic anarchy. Occupationist logic is at work here for, as Baxendale argues, one of the most significant aspects of his own comic art was its ability to leave all questions of authority and order purposefully *unresolved*, adhering to the logic of what Baxendale calls a 'general shambles'.⁶³ Looked at under homological conditions, since *Weapons of Happiness* trod the fashionably untidy 'no theoretical line' - the performance ended with the young radicals leaving for the countryside, as some of the British counter-culture did, only to find it a dead end - we can once more identify a play that unified anarchic political content with a reflective lawless genre.

Fin the Theatre

Underpinned by OM theory, the syndicalist policy adopted by post-'68 political theatre announced the radicalised playwright's project to seize and adapt the means of cultural production - the multi-dimensional mechanics of the theatre - to communicate essential Sorelian ideals. In taking control of the space they too achieved a certain control of productive output. Linked to spatial occupation political theatre disseminated a Sorelian/Situationist critique of intellectual, cultural, functional separation. Within the material time and space of the occupied theatre building political playwrights consciously sought to blur all models of social oppositions, merging the hitherto separated fields of art/politics, inside/outside, fiction/reality, and artistic/intellectual production. In doing this it posed numerous questions for the audience. These interrogations ranged from, What is art and what is politics? to, Where does one genre end and another start? Plays posed other conundrums as well as these. For example, Why should art, theatre, and politics be divided into separate fields of production and meaning making practice, anyway? Or, If a children's comic or tabloid comic-strip can be converted to engage with ideological questions, particularly OM theory, why cannot theatre? If drama is *being* political is it still

⁶³ Leo Baxendale, *On Comedy: The Beano and Ideology* (Stroud: Reaper Books, 1989), p. 18.

theatre, and, does it matter? Which is the most important, theatre, art, or politics? Could politics be considered as art or political art be thought aesthetic? Can the theatrical exist within the political and the political within the theatrical? If it looked like a political meeting, smelt like a political meeting, and tasted like a political meeting why not think of it as such when to all intent it has the potential to be one? The answers to these questions, if any existed, were, however, not the ends the playwright ultimately strove for. Questioning, in syndicalist theatre, was an end in and for itself. And, post-'68, political theatre undermined its own intellectual authority and hierarchical leadership by instigating debate or positive ideological confusion in the space/time of the event.

The Demonstration exemplified the syndicalist writer's desire to break down existing models of hierarchical classification. Bright, a figure fitted in to the drama to articulate old-left views, says: 'There, out there, is life. And here in this box we create art. But life remains one thing and art another. Art should not imitate life, it should translate life' (*The Demonstration Act 1/1*). But, redolent of *Occupations*, and chronologically almost inseparable from the time/space of the *événements* - performed in 1969 when the aftershocks of May'68 still reverberated across Europe and the US - this statement was contested by transposing the 1969 theatre experience into a tangible contemporary political situation. For instance, once Situationist slogans began to be bandied about, the fictional university theatre - and the civic theatre in which the play was being presented - became synchronically occupied by 'a large and animated general assembly of students', as were the concrete streets outside. Indeed, given the drama's studied verisimilitude and contemporary proximity to the *événements*, the performance notionally undermined any concept of any inside or outside to the theatrical event. Therefore, the Nottingham Playhouse became, like the occupied Odeon theatre of Paris, not the 'ex theatre of France' but, in a way, the 'ex theatre of Britain'. As actors shouted out "Power Lies In The Streets" - "Build The Barricades...Fight the Police" - "Burn Down The Stock Exchange" or a voice screamed out "What About The Political Parties", to which the angry reply came "Destroy them They're All Parties Of Fear" (*The Demonstration Act 2/1*), the playwright engineered socio-spatial disorientation, such that the ideas and images of the occupation movement broke in from the *outside* of the theatre into the *inside*. But this cross-contamination was no longer in an abstract sense, it partook of contemporary and political thinking in common,

structures of feeling invested with more political prestige by being brought literally into the real time/space of the discriminatory theatre.

In bringing the outside in, theatre workers began to slowly undermine the distinction between art and politics, art and life, hence the title of *The Demonstration*. By transposing the locus of the Nottingham theatre 'into the Sorbonne, Nanterre, Berkeley and Columbia all rolled into one!' (*The Demonstration Act 1/7*) the old-left contestation that art and life should remain separated, began to be deconstructed. The play indicated that all space is a social construct, an abstract structure which has no intrinsic meaning outside the cultural field it partakes of. If the use of space is socially specific, held together by the glue of cultural convention - man-made - then the rules and codes of these spaces can be unmade by man, restructured and re-coded.

The Demonstration, although a somewhat underly-researched play, was particular significant because, more than any other drama of the period, it staged an *argument*, like those within the occupied halls of the Sorbonne, about what might take place upon the stage about the nature of what is and is not permitted to be *discussed* within the actual space and time of the English theatre. It placed questions about the function of cultural spaces and who controls the fields of cultural and political production. If, as the specialist Bright claims, theatre, like the university, should remain and *function* within the parameters of artistic, or academic, production and control, the OM case against all restrictions, authority, and specialisation contradicted this position, suggesting that the real stage of the Nottingham Playhouse, or in *Occupations* the National Theatre London, must be reclaimed and socialised as *our* theatre. *Inter alia*, homologous to the reclaimed industrial factory, or nationalised industry, post'68 playwrights made the case that theatre should become a nationalised cultural institution controlled and owned by the whole of society not a separate *exclusive* intellectual bourgeois class.

If we return to the "*Fin De L'Université*" poster its most crucial aspect was that, although on a straightforward denotative level it headed the campaign to end the university, in a more radical way the poster *did what it said* by taking political thought *outside* the university space into other non-intellectualised and elite fields of social locale. The street became the university when contemporary debate had been brought out into the street and so logically negated the university in this act, i.e. students finished-off the university as a privileged space and social structure. Likewise, if the ultimate aim of the self-critical university was to end its own recognisable practices and forms of

operational being, the anti-theatre OM theatre-worker sought to destroy all the old meanings and assumptions of what the terms and space of the theatre meant by bringing the struggles of the everyday outside world into the historically hermetic field of elite theatre. In this fashion it sought to end its cultural, functional, and physical separation from everyday life, posting its own call to "*Fin* the Theatre" from within.

Chapter 3: Sexuality

Since the beginning of my activity in the field of social hygiene, the idea had become more and more fixed in my mind that cultural happiness in general and sexual happiness in particular are the real content of life, and should be the goal of a practical politics of the people.
Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*.

Love offers the model of perfect communication: the orgasm, the total fusion of two separate beings. It is a transformed universe glimpsed from the shadows of everyday survival. Its intensity, its here-and-nowness, its physical exaltation, its emotional fluidity, its eager acceptance of precariousness, of change: everything indicates that love will prove the key factor in recreating the world. Our emotionally dead survival cries out for multi-dimensional passions. Lovemaking sums up and distils both the desire for, and the reality of, such a life. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

"Everyone is a Prostitute, selling themselves for money". *Nobody's Scared*, The Subway Sect. Motion Records.

"When I Think of Revolution I Want To Make Love". Paris May'68 Graffiti.

The Sexual Revolution: A New Progressive Mood

With the 1964 general election won, Harold Wilson's incumbent 'socialist' Labour government instigated a set of radical sexual reforms which looked to fundamentally lift Britain out its conservative past. In just twelve months parliament legalised abortion and decriminalised homosexuality between consenting adults.¹ Four years later the 'Divorce Reform Act' (1969) looked to be even more radical by making marital separation easier, and, more importantly, socially acceptable. Wilson's modernising zeal was helped along by scientific technological advance which developed the contraceptive pill. The arrival of oral contraception was particularly revolutionary since it allowed young men and women to be sexually active, free from the fear of unwanted pregnancy. More significant still, social demand for the pill flagged up the desire for un-procreative sex.² Sex was now for the sake of sex, a pleasurable end in itself.³

¹ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 97.

² Sandy Craig, ed, *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain* (Ambergate: Amber Lane Press, 1980), p. 50.

³ In the United States the 'Yippie' movement (Youth International Party) urged young people to embrace limitless free love. In New York's Central Park American youth gathered at 'love-ins', some just to embrace, others to establish contact with potential sexual partners. In California heterosexual couples unashamedly stripped off and dived into communal swimming pools to engage in 'eye-balling', exhibiting 'warmth and love' in joyful human physical contact. Doris C O'Neil, *LIFE The 60s* (Boston: Bullfinch Press 1989), p. 127. For an excellent pictorial overview of the period, *Life* encapsulates many of the ideas I discuss, illustrating them in colour and black and white plates.

At the Isle of Wight rock festival (1970), for example, British hippies engaged in open-air sexual activity, spending much of the time naked. (see figure 12). In a London cinema Richard Neville performed a live sex-act, whilst sex-fairs in Europe, such as the Amsterdam 'Wet Dream Festival' (1970), openly showed films of an explicit sexual nature. In pop & rock The Rolling Stones released the sexually frank *Lets' Spend the Night Together* and penned the hit *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*. Around this same period the founder of the London Arts Lab, Jim Haynes, started his provocatively titled *Suck* magazine, a publication which organised experimental centres for sexual 'happenings'; for sexual happenings read orgies. In colloquial terms it was a 'leg over scene', an epoch of liberated sexual practice, a free-for-all situation encapsulated in the collective sex of the 'daisy chain'.⁴ Jim Haynes:

Sex was my drug [...] I had a revelation in the early 60s that sexuality, when it was positive, was one of the greatest sources of human pleasure, ever. When it was negative, it was one of the greatest sources of human pain. I started examining it, observing it, reading about it, thinking about it, talking about it. I was obsessed. Asking people, 'Is your sex life good and, if so, why? If not, why not?'⁵

In Britain, then, if not France, the 1960s are frequently configured as a period of sexual liberation. If political revolution had been ruled out of the equation, as the international collapse of May'68 demonstrated, we can speak of the success of the 'sexual revolution'. As Alan Sinfield suggests, we identify the era with the arrival of a 'new progressive mood'.⁶

Within the field of culture a fresh approach to sex was symbolised in 1968 when the power of the Lord Chamberlain to cut sexually explicit material from theatre productions was withdrawn and a 'wave of nudity' materialised upon the stage.⁷ Similarly, post-'68, productions made by political theatre demonstrate a thoroughgoing commitment to the emancipation of significant clusters of sexually explicit material.⁸ Staged two years after the censorial

⁴ Jonathan Green, ed, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 419, 420, & 424.

⁵ Jim Haynes, in Green, p.418.

⁶ Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 32.

⁷ Kershaw, p 127-128.

⁸ Many post-'68 political plays contain some reference to sexuality. In the plays I have already examined, for example, we see sexually explicit scenes or references to sexuality - particularly childhood sexuality - in *AC/DC*, *Weapons Of Happiness*, *Christie in Love*, *Gum and Goo*, and

castration of the Lord Chamberlain, actresses acted out scenes of simulated heterosexual sex in the David Hare play *Slag* (1970). In a later, though promiscuously comparable piece, a young woman in Snoo Wilson's *Vampire* (1973) explores adolescent sexuality and masturbates whilst playing upon a children's swing. Further evidence of the contemporary concern with sexuality can be seen in David Edgar's play of the same year, *Baby Love* (1973), a drama about pre-marital inter-racial sex. In Stephen Poliakoff's *Hitting Town* (1974) the ideals of the sexual revolution were made present with graffiti which offered "Even The Queen Enjoys It". Performed two years after *Baby Love*, Edgar's exploration of the sex industry, *The National Theatre* (1975), provided overt images of a pornographic nature in the production's reproduction of a Soho-sex bar. Scripted by Howard Barker, *Claw* (1975) commenced when a Mrs Biledew appeared, holding an illegitimate child, begotten from one of many extramarital wartime sexual relationships, she confronted the audience with the rhetorical, 'Well was I supposed to go without for five years? Was he going to go without? Like hell he was!' (*Claw Act 1/1*).

Sexual Utopianism

As exemplary performances - dramas with sexual clusters - these plays did not subsist parasitically, merely reflecting the sexual revolution from a detached distance, since the intelligentsia of political theatre were influenced by the same iconoclastic counter-cultural texts which informed the sexual revolution.⁹ One of the most influential writers on the milieu was the Austrian sexologist Dr Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957).¹⁰ His two key books *The Function of the Orgasm* (1947) and *The Sexual Revolution* (1951) were widely available and read by many of those counter-cultural intellectuals campaigning for a

The Party. To this list one could add the Barry Keeffe trilogy: *Gem, Gotcha and Getaway*, and John McGrath's, *Yobbo Nowt*. Consequently, the plays I have chosen to analyse in this chapter are simply an exemplary, though particularly relevant, sample.

⁹ To evidence the influence of Reich further, see Herbert Marcuse *Eros and Civilisation* (1958); *One Dimensional Man* (1964); Paul Goodman's *Gestalt Therapy* (1951); *The Empire City* (1941-1958); *Making Do* (1967); and Norman Brown *Love's Body* (1966); Alan Ginsberg's, *Howl* (1956); C. Wright Mills, *Causes of World War III* (1957).

¹⁰ Although the Situationists and many other anarchist flavoured counter-culturalists dismissed many of Marcuse's ideas, as they dismissed almost every other institutionalised intellectual idea - they were particularly scandalised by his theory of 'repressive tolerance' and insistence upon the necessity of retaining a certain 'reality principle' (see Theodor Roszak and *Situationist International Anthology*) - it would be a mistake to believe that Situationist sexual ideas do not reflect some Marcusean thought. For example the Situationists seem to concur with Marcuse's affirmation that eros or libido can only be liberated after technocratic society has delivered what they called 'the world of survival'. Compare *Eros and Civilisation*, p. 152. and Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), p. 246.

sexual revolution.¹¹ Reich was particularly influential upon the theories of the SI.¹² For example, the infamous SI slogan "I Take My Desires For Reality" - an adage which encapsulated the spirit of the Paris'68 revolution - was Reich writ large across the cityscape. And, because political theatre was influenced by the SI, we can trace a strong Reichian logic - if not directly Situationist - underpinning post-'68 drama.

In stark contrast to other Marxist thinkers, Reich believed a strictly radical revolutionary socialist society can only come to fruition *after* a sexual revolution. In post-sexual-revolutionary cultures, children, adolescents, and adults would be unfamiliar with any form of sexual repression. Unlike the disciplinary demands of bourgeois society, sexual life would develop naturally without interference from repressive authoritarian codes. Sexuality would begin when puberty demands. Naturalisation of the sex-act would also allow sexual partners to be freely exchanged without jealousy, fear of punitive violence, or state interference. Thinking homologically, Reich realised that the human body, like the capitalist means of production, must be freed-up from all forms of private possessive structures. In 'modernised' industrial societies this would necessarily mean the abolition of compulsory marriage, plus free contraception, and abortion on demand. Comparable to the primacy the Soviet Union placed on workers' councils occupying and socialising industrialised spaces, Reich said the body too can only control and organize its physical needs by seizing and reconstructing new cultural areas. This involved the creation of collective *Komosols* where young 'communards', *Kulturbolschewismus*, could discuss sexual matters and indulge in sexual activity away from moral censorship.¹³

Broadly speaking, in a Reichianesque society sexually active 'healthy' subjects would reside within a spontaneous, non-repressive, joyful and natural environment. Sexual revolution must therefore seek to safeguard sexual pleasure by eliminating sexual un-pleasure from human societies. For in societies which had achieved this (Reich cites a primitive society of South Sea Islanders, the Matriarchal Trobriander - a 'sex-affirmative' paradise where

¹¹ See Sheila Rowbotham's excellent personal account of the radical cultural and sexual milieu in her autobiographical *Promise of a Dream-Remembering the Sixties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), in which Reich is mentioned on several occasions. Mick Farren's book *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette* also consistently refers to Reich's work, providing an in-depth description of the promiscuity prevalent during the sixties.

¹² We see multiple references to Reich in many Situationist, and Situationist influenced texts, OZ and *Playpower* to name but two.

¹³ Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Towards a Self Governing Character Structure* (London: Vision Press, 1969), see chapter xii, 'The Inhibition in Youth Communes'. * I reference here both the hardback edition (1969) and its paperback version (1970).

young people could freely explore their adolescent sexuality)¹⁴ there was a notable absence of what Reich calls 'secondary perversions' such as sexual fantasies, pornography, sado-masochism, rape, prostitution, murder, and the neurotic mental illness he identified in 'sex-negative' societies.¹⁵ To sum up, Reich required revolutionaries to create, or re-create, sexual utopia.

In affirmation of the efficacy of a sexual paradise, Reich's vision of a primitive naturalness is clearly worked out in a great deal of post-'68 political drama. In Snoo Wilson's *Vampire*, for example, the original spontaneity of adolescent sexuality was indicated by the portrayal of an idealised free human subject unsurprisingly called 'Joy'. Having experienced the pleasure of orgasm through masturbation - brought on by the motion of a swing - she is told by her older sister that she will 'go blind' or 'go to hell' for masturbating, but Joy counters 'it felt natural enough to me!' (*Vampire Act 1/1*). In other sketches audiences were shown 'Joy' naked, happily admiring the curves of her own bodily form. They also observed 'Joy' seduce the miserable Reuben who, having abstained from sexual activity in conformity with the predominant patriarchal sexual morality, cannot control his natural sexual desire any longer, and takes the young girl as his lover. Henceforth, when the sound of pleasurable - sex-affirmative - lovemaking filled the performance space, the physical enjoyment of sexual activity was conveyed to the audience by Joy's 'ecstatic' cries. Post-coitus, far from showing remorse, Joy was portrayed to be cheerful, satisfied, and light-hearted. The political message the audience were invited to glean from the short scene, was that natural sex is healthy.

In *Slag* untainted sexuality was indicated by the character Elise. Despite criticism that she displayed a 'backward dependency upon the body' she defiantly asserts 'I'm a natural sort of woman'. Liberated from moral exigencies, she daydreams of 'vaginal orgasms', and, in contrast to the two other sexually abstinent women (the drama is set in an abstract experimental anti-sexual community), she exhibits a wider lust for life. She takes pleasure from films, jokes, popular music, dancing and playing, that is, *Slag* proposed that to love sex is to 'love life' (*Slag Scenes 1 & 3*). *Claw* occupied similar territory. The play made the case that the social stigmatisation of 'bastard children' - a form of symbolic violence enacted to enforce the norms of marital relations - can only be paradoxically broken down by the contemporary promiscuous generation, epitomised by Claw Biledew. He engages in spontaneous consensual coitus

¹⁴ Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm* (London: Souvenir Press, 1999), p. 230.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (London: Vision Press, 1970), p. 35.

with the sexually-liberated, although married, Angie. Advertising the need to rebel against orthodox 'loveless' marriage, she and Claw performed hard-animal sex by the roadside. Although they disappeared behind shrubs, an allusion to the audience's own repressed status perhaps (the censoring of the sex act), loud music from a popular dance routine played as clothes were removed and laughter emanated around the theatre space; the playwright again nodding to the joy of sex (*Claw Act 2/2*). In *Hitting Town* a neurotic young woman, rigid with 'adult' sexual embarrassment, is seduced by her younger more 'childish' sexually energetic brother. As the actor and actress partook of a 'sexual kiss', the intimate physicality of it informed the audience that incestuous relations might be 'quite exciting'. In keeping with other examples, post-coitus *Hitting Town* suggested that, though exhausted - they have been having sex all night - they were now happy, calm and without worry. What is more the play ended with the sister tentatively condoning incestuous sexuality (*Hitting Town* Scene 7).¹⁶

Anti-Utopian Sexuality

On the surface, then, *Slag*, *Hitting Town*, *Claw*, and *Vampire* contain significant clusters which demonstrate the period's commitment to promoting utopianism and, more importantly, political theatre's *celebration* of the ongoing sexual revolution. Moreover, if we reflect back to the description of Reich's modernist utopia, the case can be put that, post-1964, in Britain many of libertarian structural reforms Reich prescribed were already in place, reforms initiated by a radical socialist administration. Paradoxically, however, political theatre's confirmatory clusters of natural sexuality were consistently outnumbered by multiple depictions of those sexual practices Reich thought sexual perversions, examples of negative sexuality. *The National Theatre*, for example, showed the human body, reduced to a consumable product, constantly exploited within a *recuperative* London-based sex industry. The play established that the body of the male consumer, and that of the consumed female, were, in reality, ensconced in a perverted situation, exploited to make

¹⁶ One could argue that sibling incest might be outside the field of a Reichian natural sexuality criteria, perhaps a perversion for Reich. But neo Reichians, and neo Freudians, (see footnote# 9) endorsed incestuous sexuality as *natural* and its taboo status as un-natural. See, for instance, Vaneigem's comment in Chapter 1 'Anti-Oedipus' about the nit-picking distinctions by forensic pathologists. Likewise, Claude Levi-Straus remarked that 'the prohibition of incest... is the fundamental step in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished' - *ipso facto* a non-repressive culture would allow it. See Kate Soper *What is Nature?*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 51-52.

money. For instance, the 'owner' of the now sexualised means of production, a pornographic entrepreneur, insists that women-as-sex-product conform to 'fantasised' male stereotypes of passive virginal adolescents: one sex-worker wore a school girl uniform, sucked a lollipop, whilst another appeared dressed in a 'baby doll' nightie. *Claw* resembled *The National Theatre* and Hare's *Slag - Slag* talked about 'giving your cunt to capitalism' (*Slag Scene 1*) - in that it persistently confronted the audience with the body's exploitation in servicing perverse forms of un-natural sexuality. *Claw* sells pictures of adolescent girls in the shower to newsagents, which are then sold 'from under the counter' to sexually frustrated adults (*Claw Act 1/1*).

Reichian-influenced plays also residually highlighted the public's assimilation of sex with synonyms of dirt or shame. In *Claw* to take part in any form of erotic activity is shown to risk being labelled a 'dirty little sod' or called 'disgusting'. Sex in modern society, the play suggested, still takes place behind closed doors, and walls, whilst characters indicative of healthy sexuality, Angie, are kept hidden away 'like some shameful syphilitic relative, secreted in the attic' (*Claw Act 2/1*). In *Vampire* the drama's symbol of natural sexuality, 'Joy', is residually punished, abolished from the social sphere for committing a 'deed of darkness'. Joy's unrestrained lovemaking is disciplined further when her authoritarian and religious father admonishes her to 'cover your shame you mad hussy' stating 'what you have done has outlawed you from society' (*Vampire Act 1/1*).

The Sexual Revolution: Postponed

The promiscuity of these negative clusters - images and scenes which portrayed sexual relations in a pessimistic light - seem something of an anomaly given that, following the 60s 'sexual revolution', the period is synonymous with a positive promiscuity. Yet, like all significant clusters in post'68 drama, they can *as clusters*, be explicated. The overriding rationale is that an absence or scarcity of utopian descriptions was deliberate for this reason: *they were still utopian*. Despite the pretensions of the radical revolutionaries at OZ, for the majority of British society the sexual revolution had largely been postponed. *Ipsa facto* political theatre reproduced extant social reality. Sex-negative performances reflected that utopia remained a sort of absent non-place. Holding the mirror up to reality, radicalised playwrights depicted, on the whole, sexless environments and miserable subjects - in both

senses of the word. Political playwrights were simply stating that, despite the liberal anti-censorial atmosphere, backed by free-thinking social legislation and scientific advance, sexual liberation remained utopian. Performances were merely symptomatic of the fact that the sexual revolution, far from reaching the psychic structure of the masses, had largely left cultural attitudes untouched. Overall, then, these selected plays, did not reflect or celebrate the success of the sexual revolution, but publicised its failures, alerting the spectator to its *incompleteness*.

There are, of course, sound historical reasons and cultural precedents for this incongruity. In the Soviet Union it was commonplace to believe that the Russian economic revolution would go hand in hand with a wide-scale sexual revolution.¹⁷ The two, it was thought, were intrinsically symbiotic. Homologous to contemporary post-'68 radical philosophy, the Soviet Union and its ideologues launched an iconoclastic attack not only on the economic base, but the whole of the 'life negating social order'. Correspondingly, foreshadowing the SI, the Bolsheviks looked to deprive not only the ruling class of power, but its representative in the patriarchal family, the Father. The rearing and sexual education of children was given over to collectives and socialist pedagogues. However, the soviet sexual revolution ultimately failed (alongside its workers' councils) because, homologous to the situation in Britain, legislation or formal structural change alone was not enough. Realising this Reich maintained that 'the effect of the sexual revolution cannot be judged by the laws that were passed...but only by their effect on the masses of people'.¹⁸ Put differently, he said that a sexual revolution can only be deemed successful if it achieves a deep reaching change in the emotions and instinctual life and changes the 'psychic structure' of the masses, and so alters what *they*, not their authoritarian leaders, think about sexuality.¹⁹

But as the British and Soviet experiences illustrate, as a political objective the undoing of psychological indoctrination is a complex knot to unravel. Reich argued that the suppression of the organism begins far back in childhood within the bourgeois familial situation, which raises the infant in a residual *anti-sexual* environment. For example, children, he thought, are generally brought up without any form of sexual guidance or education. Or, deemed prematurely sexually active by parental authority, they suddenly find

¹⁷ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, (1970), p. 156.

¹⁸ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, (1970), p. 169.

¹⁹ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, (1970), p. 164 & 169.

themselves punished for expressing what they perceived as natural biological sensations - the negative adjectives we hear used in these performances towards sexualised subjects being perfect examples of this fact. Moreover, traumatic punitive events live on in the now dejected adult and form negative 'sexual guilt feelings' feelings towards all aspects of sexuality.²⁰ By internalising these prohibitions, young people - the youthful audience of political theatre being these same despondent subjects - un-naturally come to equate healthy sexual appetite or aggressive desire with abject disgust. Once inculcated within the individual's own dispositions or *habitus*,²¹ thwarted erotic sexuality turns to abhorrence.

Transmuted into hatred, healthy sexual aggression is raged against sexuality itself, repressed individuals reproduce anti-sexual ideology *en masse*. And once ingrained in the subject, internalised attitudes become the externalised disapproving stances society exhibits towards sexuality. Reich called these destructive attitudes *character armour*. The toughened-up individual publicly condemns sexuality, and espouses the moral cultural ideals of marriage, abstinence, and sexual modesty. This moral and ascetic *role playing* then armours (protects) the individual from the fear of perceiving his/her biological vegetative sensations, which, as the spectator's ontogeny has made clear, are now to be experienced by the organism as threatening, paradoxically transformed into un-pleasure. Guarded from instinctual desire the organism's capacity for pleasure is arrested, held down. Modern character is therefore experienced as personal rigidity, loss of spontaneity and, ultimately, political and cultural paralysis, inauthentic, unknowable, an alien shape.²² In addition, for Reich, familial infantile repression is ultimately mirrored in the forms and shapes a sexually abstinent society takes, there is a 'direct correlation between character structure and social structure'.²³ The character of modern society, and its culture, thus conform to the same negative aptitudes and dispositions the individual exhibits. Modern culture had contracted what Reich broadly identified as a self-punitive 'psychic plague', a pathology transmitted through 'a sex-repressing patriarchy', a force which had 'perpetuated itself over a thousands of years'.²⁴

²⁰ Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 79.

²¹ I use the term *habitus* in Bourdieu's sense of dispositions. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994).

²² Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p.147, 209, & 8.

²³ Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p.187.

²⁴ Reich, *Sexual Revolution*, (1970), pp. 192. 'Objective Causes of the Inhibition'.

The extrapolation of the microcosmic regulative self into the self-policing macrocosm of society is significant for it allowed Reich, and a Reichian SI, to theorise why sexual revolutions have historically failed, whether in 1920s Russia or 1960s Britain. Sheila Rowbotham, for example, the young new-left activist and political-theatre worker I cite in the introduction, describes how within her own generation attitudes towards sex as 'sleazy' hung over from the 1950s and, despite pretensions to permissiveness, 'my generation was still being brought up as if ignorance was akin to innocence'. She writes:

Even though we were rejecting the trappings of traditional forms of protection, bashing our way out of all acceptable modes of behaviour and heading full tilt towards existential authenticity, we continued to contend with a powerful and disturbing undertow...it was a kind of cusp in sexual attitudes; prohibition and permission were shifting but had yet to realign.²⁵

Orgasmotheatre

Given the enduring strength of these repressive 'hang-ups' - to use a contemporary term - the initial work of post-'68 political theatre became one of sexual interventionism. In seeking to alleviate residual repression, political theatre identified that, like the communards of *Komoso!*, it too must create a radically free space, a liberated area within which repressed individuals could confront, resolve, even destroy, socio-cultural taboos. Post-'68 dramatists awoke to the fact that a sexually radicalised political theatre must become a therapeutic instrument, and post-'68 this is what it commonly did.²⁶

At the most fundamental level political theatre searched for restorative solutions by making the field of drama a new area for far-reaching debate. Comparable to the radical OM-theatre, everything had to be opened up for discussion, albeit now sexual. Political theatre appreciated that to leave any topic un-touched/not discussed, amounted to an acceptance and reproduction of the very repressive models of living Reich and the SI condemned.²⁷ For

²⁵ Sheila Rowbotham, *The Promise of a Dream-Remembering the Sixties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. 23.

²⁶ See Peter Ansorge, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain*, (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975), p. 46. Ansorge identifies post-'68 political theatre as 'theatre as therapy'.

²⁷ Reich maintained that the public meeting is democratic because, for Reich, 'a social system cannot be called democratic if it is afraid of posing decisive questions, finding unaccustomed answers, and engaging in discussion about such questions and answers'. Reich, *The Function*

example, comparable to Reich's public meetings where attendees put blunt questions like this: 'What should a woman do when the man does not gratify her?' or 'My daughter is just seventeen years old and already has a boy friend. Is there anything wrong with that?'²⁸ sex-political theatre freed-up environments in which dramatists and audiences could find room to openly discuss their own sexual questions. *Hitting Town* is a case in point and, as we noted, asked often probing, uncomfortable questions about incestuous sex, sibling desire and social sexual anomie. In *Vampire and Claw*, Wilson and Barker broached the repression and policing of childhood and adolescent sexuality. These two plays also raised a discussion around the socially persistent ideal that modern women continue the cult of passive virginity, as Edgar did in *Baby Love* and *The National Theatre*. This new openness was particularly epitomised by *Slag* when it argued that, in contrast to masculine ideological theory, 'The clitoris has been scientifically established as having the greatest concentration of sensory nerve endings of any part of a human body, male or female.[...] It has inch for inch, measure for measure, a far greater erectile capacity than the comparatively dull, insensitive, numb male organ' (*Slag* Scene 3).

Faced with the anti-sexual society, the function sex-political theatre set itself was not to bemoan and reflect this fact, but, again, to *do something about it*: be active, not passive. Customarily, this meant that dramatists played around with the abstract and non-abstract social aspects of theatre and their synthesis in the performance experience. For involved with the dissemination of the sexual information I describe above, political theatre constructed a discursive situation located in the space of the theatre, a material performativity engaged in tangible *practical work*. Homological to Reich's 'practical politics of the people', political theatre transformed itself into a 'practical theatre of the people', no longer theoretically removed, but doing something vital, useful, *everyday*. This was political theatre engaged in the material struggles of the milieu, struggles shared by the audience and society at large. Indeed, it is not going too far to conceptualise that the role of this therapeutic theatre was to make available a secure space in which the agents of the potential sexual revolution could reconcile the phylogenetic and ontogenic repressed past - the psychic history of both the species and the atomised spectator - within a potentially liberated ready-made legislative present. By providing a platform for freedom of speech, like Reich's orgasmotherapy, post'68, a recognisable

²⁸ of the *Orgasm*, p.17. Thus a democratic Reichian theatre, too, must engage in this discussion.
Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p.192.

orgasmotheatre emerged; a theatre dedicated not to big-P Revolutionary politics, but the release of the orgasm, sexual gratification and pleasure. As vicarious *Komosols*, then, political dramatists turned theatre buildings into social spaces in which young people could learn about and discover 'better forms of living'; a radical process aided by the use of the very sexual education and information Reich advocated in orgasmotherapy.²⁹

The Publicity of Misery v The Misery of Publicity

Political theatre's overt utterances of sexual issues, leads necessarily to a direct comparison with psychoanalytic discursive practice, drama as talking cure. If therapy is about verbalisation, saying the un-sayable, in this therapeutic space human desire was being articulated. Associatively it is tempting to conflate a Reichian drama of discussion, with a Freudian talking-cure theatre. There is, though, a theoretical problem of aligning any Reichian, Situationist, or post-'68 performance politics, with Freudian concepts or praxis. Although initially a keen student of Freud's, Reich rejected Freudianism. He criticised its insistence upon the passive recounting of dreams or hypnotic talkativeness of the therapeutic attendee, believing that knowledge of repression may come to light through the insinuations of 'the subject who is supposed to know'.³⁰ By contrast, Reich was adamant that effective psychoanalysis should be interested in the publicity of 'bodily expression'.³¹ It was in personal visible somatica, the physical forms and manifestations of the modern self, that power resided; not in the unconscious, but the material world: the *physical forms* subjugated subjects adopted. It was in their character armour, (and, ultimately, their culture), that the corporal expression of their misery dwelled.³²

Realising a homological connection between the distorted physical shape of the individual and the cultural and material forms of its society, orgasmotheatre concentrated on the *physical aesthetic* forms of drama, not the discursive. But how? A play is a performance, not a repressed subject or neurotic social structure? How did it rectify this anomaly? One stratagem was to turn the logic of character armour against itself. Character armour, as we have seen, protects the repressed subject from its inner nature by publicly outlawing

²⁹ Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 14.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), pp. 224-5, 227, 230-43, 253, 256-7, 259.

³¹ *Inter alia*, Reich was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association by Anna Freud - Freud's daughter - for this theoretical dissonance. Charles Rycroft, *Reich: Fontana Modern Masters* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1976), p. 12.

³² Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 301.

sexuality from the formal idiomatic gestures of the personality. Treated this way sexuality becomes, as Julia Kristeva outlines in *Powers of Horror* (1982), publicly abject, disgusting, non-human. Abjection occurs because that which is experienced as repugnant, is often that which signifies the boundary of the human with the animal or natural. Therefore the abject protects civilised society from straying into the monstrous territory of bestial - uncivilised - sexuality.³³ Reconfigured within terms of a systematic 60s sexual revolution, abjected from society, sexuality was not unnatural but radically *natural*. Logically, radicals argued modern society had acquired a form of anti-nature. It was society as-it-existed which should be considered *as abject*. The orthodox opposition was simply culturally misguided.

Seeking as always to unite form and content, dramatists of the orgasmotheatre used purposefully abject forms to represent, or *publicise*, the abjectness of *public* existence. Ken Knabb, the translator and editor of *The Situationist International Anthology* (1989), for instance, argues that one of the most useful ways neo-situationists should 'Use Reich' is to understand the way his particular psychoanalytic method uses the 'publicity of misery' to undermine the 'misery of publicity'.³⁴ That is, radical art must make art miserable to render the abject *public*. In Reich's case he used his texts and writings. *Pace* Reich, Poliakov's *Hitting Town* publicised modern social wretchedness. Equivalent to the cultural laws and prohibitions which informed the play, and society, the drama situated the audience in a bleak miserable environment far removed from any idealised natural south-sea sexual paradise. In reality, the abstract set of *Hitting Town* suggested a modern concrete architectural environment, a representation of harsh, cold, and un-natural 'man-made' locations. The bleak prefabricated tower block and unfriendly shopping precinct stood in for the extended rigid character armour which structures the social whole. To emphasise the abject character of the social order further, sexual relations in *Hitting Town* are reduced to 'dirty phone calls' and secreted spy holes hidden in the walls of 'grubby' flats. These flats are cell-like, 'hard and sharp', the synthetic environment gives the character Claire 'sores'. In effect, Claire is a Reichian neurotic *par excellence*. Sexless, this young woman moves about stiffly, disabled with excessive politeness, has eating disorders, cleaning compulsions, and is embarrassed about sex. Afraid of becoming the abject

³³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 12-13-11.

³⁴ Ken Knabb, 'Reich, How to Use', <http://www.slip.net/~knabb/PS/reich.htm>

herself she articulated the wider social subject's fear of 'getting a bad name' (*Hitting Town* Scene 1).

The performance environment was made more miserable, perceptibly abject, because the play was pervaded by a flat sexual anomie, an existential ennui suggested by the presence of monotonous and anonymous music. At 'the-weekly-discotheque', rather than communicate and have a good time - as Reich's model communards would - the audience witnessed, and became party to, a depressing situation in which young people stand around, joyless and lonely. The unsettling boredom was broken only by a repressed adolescent letting go a loud primal scream, an act which released not only the 'clenched feeling' building up inside of her, but that of the miserable play itself (*Hitting Town* Scene 5). Poliakoff's art-of-misery evoked abjection further because, homologous to the existence of the socialised spectator, in *Hitting Town* sexuality was, for the most part, absent; sex made present only vicariously. Matching the culture of the fictional British youth the play foregrounded, as attendees at the disco, paying theatre-goers had to be satisfied with a nightclub DJ playing 'plastic' records about alienated human love (*Hitting Town* Scene 5).

Hitting Town's exploitation of a fashionable phone-in-radio presenter pointed out the pervasiveness of censorial and inculcated morality. For example, when Ralph phones in the chat show, (which purports to deal openly with sexual problems), revealing 'on air' that he and his sister have had sexual intercourse, in a semblance of the subject's armouring mind, Poliakoff suddenly aborts the discussion. The theatre, like the social sphere, was thrown into silence. Equally, when the DJ apologises to the audience for the disturbing 'sick and stupid' comments we hear in the performance environment, the implication was that media-censorship replicated the individual mind's own inner repressive voice (*Hitting Town* Scene 5).

In complete contrast to the idea that incestuous desire was abject, in *Hitting Town*, it was only after the physical actors playing the brother and sister 'really' kissed, or the Claire actress seductively undressed for sex, that the audience acquired any *sexual satisfaction* from the form of the event. However abject the brother/sister relationship may have seemed - or had been *made* to appear *vis a vis* the incest taboo - the audience members were confronted (*à la* Artaudian theatre) with their own affective reaction to two opposing models of

abjection.³⁵ The first model presented the existent culturally sanctioned anti-sexual code, symbolised by the cold grey concrete plastic environment of the social scene, the alternative model showed a warm loving sexual relationship, behaviour residually considered culturally abject, albeit, in this case, incestuous. If the audience preferred the latter, as Ralph suggests they should, socially the play could be considered 'extremely dangerous'; threatening in a sexually-affirmative way. As Kristeva rightly says, the abject - because it is natural - threatens because it also fascinates and attracts and this enthrallment is always *affective*.³⁶ Configured in Situationist terms, sexually reticent subjects 'desire what they dread and dread what they desire'.³⁷

By operating within abject paradigms, then, *Hitting Town* sought to break apart the spectator's conventional character armour by paradoxically penetrating it with that which it abjects. In the play, for example, abstract comments always had material addressees, the attendees of the drama. Ralph, for instance, asked spectators, 'Am I embarrassing you yet?'. In other scenes, the couple 'smooched', and the performance space fell deadly quiet, made tactically awkward, deliberately uncomfortable (*Hitting Town* Scene 3). The knowledge these armour-busting stratagems looked to impart to the subject, then, via his/her involuntary sexual response, was that if natural affectionate sexuality is persistently absent in their lives - and the performance - it is here experienced as a presence, knowable by the spectator's demand for the release of sexual stasis, a reaction provoked by the incest scene.

Within the space and time of *The National Theatre* Edgar adapted techniques of interpersonal confrontation to disturb character armour in a rather different way. The play ended with a live sex show as three sex workers appeared upon a tatty stage, mirroring the typical sex show one would find in the basements of Soho circa late 60s early 70s. In front of the audience dancers pouted and beckoned in stereotypical fashion. Their bodies adopted sexually explicit, but culturally conventional, pornographic poses. Opening their legs, they undressed and used a children's teddy bear to masturbate. Two

³⁵ This idea of competing ideas of abjection gets worked out, of course, in the Bakhtinian notion of carnival wherein sexuality is both threatening to the social order and life enhancing, socially efficacious.

³⁶ David Cooper, *The Death of the Family* (Harmondsworth: London, 1980). Cooper talks about the threat of sexuality and madness, in the same breath, as both being potentially radical subjective 'time bombs'; precursors to real revolution. For instance he says, *pace* Reich, 'we need simultaneously a Love Revolution that re-invents our sexuality, a Madness Revolution that re-invents ourselves, and then a Revolution in terms of a far more direct paralysis of the operations of "the State"'. See p.124 & 118.

³⁷ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), p. 163.

women enacted a male lesbian fantasy in which they 'feel each other up'. The lights were dimmed and popular music played to heighten the effect. All in all the play resembled uncomplicated abstract naturalism and, as such, a portrait of the contemporary everyday. In a political sense one might venture it was about the exploitation of women (which it was). But, by crossing over into the existentially real scene of the Soho cellar, spectators may have started to experience uncontrollable sexual arousal, the point at which the women become sexual performers *for the audience*. Sat in the dark audiences were free to enjoy the satisfying sensation of a certain warm natural sexual desire. However, by demanding that auditorium lights be unexpectedly brought up, Edgar confronted the audience with an image of themselves watching the girls reflected in a large mirror placed upon the stage. The audience as sexual-spectators were therefore challenged by an unsettling mirror image of their own covert sexual surveillance. With the lights down they could hide sexual interest, but put back on spectators were faced with their own consumption of exploitative sexual forms. In a sex affirmative sense this was a positive situation, natural sexuality had been brought out into the open, human desire seen in the bright light of day, no longer hiding in the dark corners of social or psychological space.

In a sexually negative model, by situating the audience - particularly the white-male-middle-class-radical-counter-cultural spectator - within a concrete sex show, Edgar indicated that both they, and the abstract pornographers the play critiques, were alienated spectators of commodified sexuality, and so reminded of the illusory nature and depthless abjectness of that commercialised sexual fantasy. As a counter-shock tactic, capturing the sexual gaze of the male audience in the glare of the stage mirror was a crucially important dramatic device because the dramatist moved towards a conflation of the 'dirty-mag' pornography, epitomised by the reviled reactionary capitalist sex industry, and those counter-cultural publications, like *Suck*, *Oz*, and *Nasty Tales* that had also *recuperated* (the act of commandeering revolutionary or radical gestures for capital or counter-revolutionary ends - see glossary) the potential energy of a natural sexual revolution. This is not speculation. Edgar has gone on record to say that much of his post-'68 work was a revolt against the failures and 'inadequacy of the counter-culture', and so as a performance piece we can see that *The National Theatre* demonstrated the writer's implied criticism of the OZ

three, 'whose trial was viewed by some people as being somehow a great revolutionary event'.³⁸

As the OZ trial had demonstrated, though, there existed a very thin line between its own pornographic gestures and those of popular sex products - *Hustler* or *Razzle* being two cases in point. The counter-cultural sex-festivals made no bones about showing potentially exploitative blue movies. And many commentators have interpolated that far from being politically egalitarian, much of the sexual revolution only reframed the exploitation of women by men. The playwright Michelene Wandor, for example, has recalled that despite Richard Neville's claim to be breaking down oppressive sexual attitudes 'which seemed to make one very miserable',³⁹ in reality 'sexism in the underground press was appalling'.⁴⁰ Resembling the demographics of gender post-'68 political theatre exhibited, the underground-porn scene was 'totally male dominated'.⁴¹ 'Men' simply 'fucked around' often pressing women into unwanted sexual relationships castigating unwilling partners as 'frigid' or having 'hang-ups', while others recall that organised sex-festivals were, often 'the most sexless event[s] imaginable'.⁴²

Wandor's retrospective comments are useful here, too. If *The National Theatre* is comprehended as a disguised code for the counter-cultural sex show, a consumable artefact like their 'radical' 'Reichian' flavoured sexual magazine, the performance event questioned the 'radicalised' audience's alienation from any actual *material sexuality*. That is, the women of *The National Theatre* conformed to the shallow masculine stereotypes, simply 'reflecting' in the mirror, (the play is dominated by mirrors as women 'make themselves up' for men) the perverse, though normalised, male fantasises about women pornographic and counter-cultural magazines reinforced. The play alluded, for example, to dominative masculine fantasies about un-bject 'feminine mystique' or 'Madonna complexes'. The actress Ella recounts 'I once went out with a bloke whose ideal woman didn't sweat, excrete or menstruate' (*The National Theatre* Act 1).

Given the residual masculine purification of the feminine, *The National Theatre* resolutely sought to breakdown patriarchal illusion/delusion by offering a truer reflection of female bodily reality. In contradiction to the clean public role

³⁸ David Edgar, 'Towards a Theatre of Dynamic Ambiguities', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 33 (1979), p.8.

³⁹ Green, p. 422.

⁴⁰ Green, p. 401.

⁴¹ Green, p. 401.

⁴² Green, p. 420.

the female body is forced to imitate, the drama made references to feminine bodily hair - the audience witnessed women shaving; learnt that women excrete - we see them go to use the toilet asking for toilet paper; they are prone to physical imperfections and disease - actresses checked their breasts for cancerous growths; and talked about experiencing sexual arousal - they 'want it' and get 'soggy'.⁴³ Alerted to the fact that all that is *natural* about the feminine body and feminine sexuality is made socially and culturally abject the exploitative sections of the audience were confronted with their own complicity in female exploitation. In addition, *The National Theatre* reinstated that which patriarchal masculinity considers abject, the natural material female body, to conversely make its very abjection seem abject, publicly miserable. The piece also counselled male spectators in that the performance recommended that they should also beware of sexual exploitation: buying into pornographic ideological myths leaves the male consumer of sex existentially removed from any material reality.

The National Theatre, however, was not merely saying that pornographic myths and erotic idealisations are benign - one is simply gullible to believe in them - but intended to point out that historical patriarchal attitudes were still socially dangerous. In one piece, for instance, the sex-worker/actress read aloud an extract from a contemporary pornographic magazine:

It wasn't predictable you understand. He was just standing there, and he said he wanted me I thought it was a joke, because we'd had this frightful row, until I saw the bulge in his trousers, and then, without a word, quite suddenly, he hit me, right across the breasts, and shouting, "don't you laugh at me, you bitch", he kept on hitting me, I struggled with him, but it wasn't any good, he grabbed my shoulders, roughly forced me down on to the kitchen table,' 'then and there, and held me down with one hand, while he pushed the other up my skirt and started feeling for my bush, beneath my panties, and we both knew at an instant I was wet and really wanted it my slit was pulsing with desire. (*The National Theatre* Act 1)

⁴³ Different aspects of Kristevian abject theory resonate throughout *The National Theatre*. A suitable illustration is when women characters are forbidden to speak upon the stage. By portraying women muted, Edgar demonstrated how patriarchal masculinity foreclosed the expression of another bodily orifice, the mouth, for in abject theory the closure of the mouth is associated with the closure of a vagina. In this way the playwright indicated that, far from liberated, post-sexual-revolution, women were still expected to conform to classical aesthetic ideals of passive purity and impenetrability.

As 'fantasy' the audience, may again, have found the passage sexually exciting, though harmless. He/she might even buy these sex-journals. The story of sado-masochistic sex, like that of the 'sexy brother and sister scenario' in *Hitting Town*, was left-open to be interpreted as a porno adventure made for the audience, erotic and arousing. But Edgar challenged this view by openly showing the bruised body of the female sex-worker to suggest that fuelled by pornographic myths, men rape, beat, and abuse women.

In comparison to the shock-tactics of the sexual-revolution we get in OZ-style aesthetics, Edgar's *The National Theatre* set about a wholesale 'reversal of perspective'.⁴⁴ Its sexual imagery and form was disturbing because it depicted modern society, even a counter-cultural one, at best sexually joyless, at worst sexually psychotic. As a political drama it presented an abjectly shocking form to impart that natural sexuality is *not* abject, what is is the abjectness of recuperated sexuality which gave birth to these forms. What the mirror in the play 'reflected', then, was a real world *dystopia*. Unifying its form and content, as a 'realist' play about contemporary society *The National Theatre* was miserable, but it alleged what made this misery was the misery of public forms of acceptable lifestyles, both confirmative and alternative. In its overt utterances the play proposed that all forms of sexual fantasises, merely fill the gap 'between what we have and what we feel we need. Deserve. Our fantasies, cosmetic, so our lives can live with their reflection in the glass' (*National Theatre Act 1*). But of course the reflection in the glass, the image of society, is ultimately unliveable. This social criticism became explicit with the observation that anyone who partakes of 'masturbation fantasies' in their 'life, is utterly degrading, tawdry, hypocritical, a lie. A fiction' (*National Theatre Act 1*).

Claw, Baby Love, Slag, and The National Theatre thus provide evidence of political theatre's insistent engagement with anti-utopian themes and its conformity to an anti-utopian logic. They commonly presented clusters of disturbing abject forms so as to *reverse the spectator's perspective*.⁴⁵ All were dystopic because dystopia was a concrete social reality. Yet they were still utopian in that they pointed the way to utopia through an absence of utopian imagery. Rather than evoke the natural and sexually liberated Trobriandian world of Reich's dreams, political dramatists publicly presented an

⁴⁴ The term and concept of the 'reversal of perspective' is key to Situationist theory. (See Glossary.)

abject and anti-sexual society to educate the spectator about this absence. That is, they took what was socially abject - natural given sexuality - and showed that what had been abjected/ejected by society was in truth *natural*. To be sexually moral, these dramatists offered, was not natural but conventional. *Claw*, *Baby Love*, *Slag* and *The National Theatre* argued that destruction of the contemporary abject psychotic society entailed a refusal to abject or repress one's own and other's primal drives. Finally, Hare, Edgar, and Poliakoff demanded that the spectator stop viewing sex through what Vaneigem calls the eyes of the repressive 'community of ideology'.⁴⁶ Rather, the spectator had to 'base everything on subjectivity', replacing the satisfaction of his/her 'insatiable desire' at the centre of a truly liberated society, as the Reichian SI maintained they should.⁴⁷

The Joy of Sex

Categorising performances through an abject lens advances the thesis's argument that *Claw*, *Baby Love*, *Slag*, and *The National Theatre* adhered to the recognisable aesthetics of a post-'68 orgasmotheatre. Sharing a common structure of feeling with Reich's orgasmotherapy, orgasmotheatre's 'qualitative shock waves'⁴⁸, functioned to de-condition through sexual education, the whole personality of the organism in order to make the participant 'experience the moralistic attitudes of the world around them as something alien and peculiar'.⁴⁹ We can verify the depth of this emergent logic of orgasmotheatre in the aesthetic gestures of *Vampire*. As a performative 'history of sexuality' the piece provided a comprehensive depiction of sexual abjection. The drama illustrated how anti-sexual attitudes are inculcated within the mind of a child to be something feared and monstrous. Children's fairy stories, for instance, were shown to idealise young women as 'princesses' whom, 'locked in ice' by the 'King of Iceland' (paternal culture), must stay sexually chaste waiting for a 'beautiful prince'. By comparison natural sexuality is a 'thing...with teeth and claws, and sharp ripping and biting and tearing and gouging and blood-red eyes and teeth', and has 'a big cloak to hide its wickedness in' (*Vampire* Act 1/1).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Vaneigem, *Revolution*, p. 188.

⁴⁷ Vaneigem, *Revolution*, p. 188.

⁴⁸ Vaneigem, *Revolution*, p. 199.

⁴⁹ *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 175.

⁵⁰ Reich wrote: 'Any kind of literature which creates sexual anxiety must be prohibited. This includes pornography and mystery stories as well as gruesome fairy tales for children. This

However, in contrast to the miserable-art plays I analyse above, *Vampire* dealt with sexual repression in an entirely different - though not necessarily radical - way in that the play conversely critiqued abject society through its comic and imaginative form. To give an example, *Vampire* ridiculed the residual belief that humans are somehow above the material and possess a higher spiritual soul than the animal - a tenet of Victorian bourgeois idealism - when the noise the audience heard 'from above' was revealed not to be of a 'spiritual' nature, emanating from 'the spirit world', but the sound of Joy and Reuben having sex (*Vampire* Act1/1). Conventional loveless marriage was lampooned in a scene which, parodying the excessive hammed-up emotions of Victorian melodrama, shows a couple 'embracing mechanically' on their wedding night. Reuben tells his bride, not that he has had pre-marital sex with Joy, but euphemistically that he 'knew her in this bed'. Confirming the adopted ascetic role-playing character armoured subjects adopt, after the revelation of this sexual transgression, both characters commit suicide (*Vampire* Act1/1).

But, in contrast to the common suicides of Naturalism,⁵¹ the scene was made to be a ridiculous parody of these dramas. For when Ruth collapses on the bed, drinks a bottle of chloral, tears her dress open and hysterically states 'you will only take me when I am dead!' the playwright rendered the convention ridiculous (*Vampire* Act1/1). The comic effect was heightened when Reuben also attempts to commit suicide but fails, and, in a pastiche of the oedipal myth, simply blinds himself for his sexual transgression. The play grew increasingly absurd when in the following brothel scene the audience met Reuben now wearing dark glasses. The farce carried on when mistaking his outcast daughter for his wife, Joy is attacked in a coffin by her own father. With his trousers round his ankles he is shot dead, orgasms, and renders his daughter pregnant, their offspring peopling the rest of the play (*Vampire* Act1/2). By invoking this residual and dominant theatrical format, the performance drew droll attention to the construction of the spectator's ascetic self, by equating the obdurate stock gestures of often-melodramatic Victorian naturalism with the residual mechanical and stock forms of the modern identity.

Vampire is an interesting piece of political theatre, then, because it attempted to find a way to undermine the seriousness of authoritarian sexual

literature will have to be replaced by one that, instead of horrors, describes and discusses the genuine feeling for the infinitely manifold sources of pleasure in life'. *The Sexual Revolution*, (1970), p.262.

⁵¹ I am thinking here, in particular, of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888) and Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1891) which end with melodramatic suicides, as being suitable cases in point.

ideology by the fierce un-serious nature of the play's form. There is a Reichian logic at play here, because, if contemporary playwrights believed modern subjects to be still 'petrified' by the fear of sexuality and moral authority, despite the reforms already outlined, it seems theoretically consistent to deconstruct this character armour with an aggressive comic form. As Elder Olson has pointed out, jokes are really kinds of aggression. When we laugh at them it is because we feel hatred or fear for the object ridiculed.⁵² In any social struggle, comedy is a way of overcoming or transcending the very prohibitions which cause the misery of the existent social reality. For literary theorists, then, comic drama is political and *curative*. Moreover, the curativity of comedy - evident in the formal expressions of *Vampire* - reinforces the contention that post'68 a recognisable orgasmotheatre appeared; its orgasmo-performance efficacy strengthened through its association with critical satirical humour. In a nutshell, Wilson's orgasmotheatre used the *jouissance* of humour to fight for the 'joy of sex', for structurally comparable to the genital satisfaction Reich idealised, *Vampire's* comedy was fluid, affective, spontaneous, without boundaries, joyful and satisfying.

Vampire did not only use humour to articulate the need for a social reversal of perspective, unrestrained pleasure over denied pleasure, however. If sexual stasis is founded upon sexual scarcity and a dearth of joy, then a utopian orgasmotheatre - one that idealised multiple partners - provided the promiscuous spectator (the polymorphous spectator in anti-oedipal theatre) with a cornucopia of dramatic ideas and forms. Apart from melodrama and naturalism Wilson offered his audience the surrealistic imagery of 'Theatre of the Absurd'. The Victorian novel was evoked when a Dickensian ghost returns, à la 'The Ghost of Christmas Past', to warn of the horrors of war; the very conflicts, of course, Reich believed to be symptoms of a repressed healthy sexuality. Advertising the structural homology between sexual and artistic liberty *Vampire* flirted with passion plays, poetry, story telling, folk tales, Marxist, Freudian, Jungian and, suitably, Reichian social theory, all offered for the spectator's gratifying consummation.

Sexual Chaos

Wilson's affirmative 'lawless' choice of formlessness, however, can be interpreted through a more negative model. Unlike the fun aspect of aesthetic

⁵² D.J. Palmer (ed), *Comedy: Developments in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 154.

progressiveness and liberalised cultural exchange, these performances used their *chaotic form* to reflect their political content. Central to Reichian philosophy is the firm belief that, contra authoritarian fears that a sexual revolution would wreak social anarchy, it is the *non-appearance* of sexual revolution which sets in motion the very disorder it fears. Reich wrote:

What appears as chaos to the people who are warped by the authoritarian sexual order is not necessarily chaos; on the contrary, it may be the rebellion of the organism against impossible life conditions. Much of what is really chaos is not a result of any immorality on the part of youth, but the result of an unsolvable conflict between natural sexual needs and an environment which in every possible way impedes their gratification.⁵³

Consequently, Reich's sex-work configured a conceptual reversal of perspective - order is chaos and chaos is order. *Vampire*, concurring with this Reichian reversal, demonstrated to the audience that it is the elimination of Joy from society, the character Joy is cast-out of her social scene as a 'whore, jezebel' etcetera, that *causes* both the attendant social and personal misery. Indeed, on a broader historical scale the play made the case that a sexually repressive Victorian society, led to the atrocities of two World Wars, that is, the root causes of the international anarchy we see in the 1939-45 Holocaust were firmly in place in the historical dominance of repressive sexual society.

Claw, too, established a connection between the chaos of war and abject society by setting the drama amidst the bombsites of post-war Britain: Barker's piece presented sexual repression as the ruin of civilisation, not the reverse. Indeed, a comprehensible Reichian theory emerged when, dragged from the war-time rubble, a smashed-up wedding photo signalled marriage and violent repressive societies are somehow interconnected. In other scenes sexual ignorance, in particular lack of free contraception, leads to disordered and dysfunctional social familial relations. Resenting motherhood the baby Claw is ordered to 'shut up, miserable little bleeder!', and depicted as 'a little nuisance picked up along the way' (*Claw Act1/1*). Later on, *Claw* analysed society's fear of sex from a different perspective, putting the case that the popular media turn natural sexuality, and the contemporary sexual revolution at

⁵³ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, (1970), p. 194.

large, into a subject of dread and scandal. Echoing Farren's observation that the wild spirit of rock music had a homological ally in the contemporary sexual revolution - he argued that 'Reichian energy' was Rock's very essence⁵⁴ - Barker illustrated how an indoctrinated society associated sexualised pop stars (and the promiscuity of popular music) with contemporary social disorder or 'sordid goings on'. Tom Jones, Mick Jagger, and Lulu are 'bum boys' 'prostitutes' and 'whores' while the Beatles *Claw* suggested have 'eighteen illegitimate between them' (*Claw Act 3/1*). (see figure 12 for a conflation of sexuality and rock music).

In an attempt to reverse the hegemonic ideology of the anti-sexual media, *Baby Love* counter-demonstrated that cultural repression caused social lawlessness, not the liberalisation of sexuality. In the play, after her own baby dies, a young unmarried mother steals a child. Yet, hostile to tabloid criticism of promiscuous youth, Edgar put the cause of this 'spectacle of social disorder' firmly on the shoulders of state restrictions, social pressure, and inculcated morality, all of which ensured that her partner could not cohabit, and so attend the birth, perhaps preventing the child's death (*Baby Love Act 1*). And because *Baby Love* proffered that the real locus of public chaos was not cohabitation or extra-marital sex, but the state, the performance showed extant social misery to be wreaked by priests, police, psychologists, doctors and familial relations, the representatives of Britain's 'Ideological State Apparatus'. To communicate the social effect of these repressive agencies - in a further publicity-of-misery trope - the play featured the insistent whimpering of a young woman who, despite having given birth to a stillborn baby, is abandoned by society, family, and community. Moreover, during the time and space of *Baby Love*, the audience found itself abandoned, transported far from any pastoral island of kinship or ideal Komosol. That is to say, despite the sexual revolution, the girl's plaintive cries signalled the wider residual social misery, chaos, and interpersonal anarchy of contemporary life.

Other models of orgasmotheatre, however, looked to reverse the political binary of order and chaos by paradoxically being theatre that used chaotic forms to express the chaos ordered society manufactured. *Slag*, for example, a play about the creation of non-sexual ascetic environments, was purposefully disorganised in its meaning-making stratagems. Rather than merely replay the playwright's overt utterances about neurotic human

⁵⁴ Mick Farren, *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.225.

existence, it tackled the falsity of a character-armoured society by presenting frequently dissembling disjunctions between what characters say they are, and that which they are eventually revealed to be. For instance, a Marxist political theorist talks at great length about social and sexual revolution, but faints at the sight of sex. In another scene, the tattooed bodies of the women characters suggested that, in the abstract register (*Slag* is set in a women's' prison), the women are not middle-class intellectuals but working class prostitutes, whereas *ipso facto* spectators were also faced with possibility that they were watching middle-class public school girls *playing* at being social and sexual deviants⁵⁵ (*Slag* Scene 6). And so in *Slag* the way adults, and actors, represented themselves never coincided with the physical or social reality, albeit fictionalised. In writing a drama in which characters pretend to be working class, sexually chaste, politically radical, feminists, lesbians, or women prisoners the playwright recommended that any society alienated from a natural reality - removed from bodily sexuality - clearly engages in fantasy and role playing. Anti-sexual society, like the play, was therefore represented not only as chaotic and anarchic, but, like the form of the performance, unreadable, in a word, fake. As such, Hare presented the audience with a performance built upon only language/dialogue - verbal character armour - as a representation of collective reality, rather than the presence of material radical subjectivity. *Slag's* aesthetic dissemblance, therefore, was symptomatic of political theatre's wholesale project to connect and synthesise its own form with its content. The latent meaning of the play was not to be read in its discursive content alone, but in the physical form of the play as symptom. In homological terms it unified Reichian theory with a Reichian art because, as Reich insisted it is in only in the unrecognisable/recognisable clusters of physical forms that social pathology can be acutely glimpsed.

The idea that a play's character armour can be homological to that of the human got worked out in a particularly playful and knowing way in *Vampire*. Because, in selecting bedroom farce to represent sexually repressed society (the performance was peppered with men and women in sexually compromised situations hiding behind cupboards or coffins), Wilson used an existent dominant form which has its very genesis in sexual repression. By its very nature the action of farce is driven by the fear of sexual misdemeanours - being

⁵⁵ Like the SI, Reich loved the potential of the deviant as a social sign of sexual rebellion. 'Again and again I found how much more vital these so-called delinquents were than all the well-behaved hypocrites, just because they did rebel against a social order which denied them their most primitive natural right.' Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (1970), p. 256.

caught with one's own character armour down as it were.⁵⁶ By the same logic, bourgeois art is itself a homological *manifestation* of a very real material culture. Comparable to pitting the abject against the abject, by using bedroom farce against social farce the playwright put the form against the social structure which caused the aesthetic effect. Here, though, laughter was no longer in the service of sexual repression, as farce perhaps ultimately is, and therefore the maintenance of the existing sexual order of things, but its undoing, bourgeois art used, like the occupied theatre, factory, or university, against itself. Wilson hijacked farce - as he did nineteenth-century naturalism - to flag the essential need to go beyond, not only social and political forms of living, but society's dominant and dominating aesthetic styles. The theoretical stamp of May'68 on political theatre is visible here because, as I have outlined, in Situationist radical theory all everyday struggles are ultimately interconnected, homological.

Another Reversal of Perspective: Sexual Politics; The New Economy - "Everyone is a Prostitute"

The SI's call for a radical interconnectedness is manifested in no clearer example than their unification of the sexual revolution and socio-economic revolution.

So far I have made the case that post-'68 political theatre concerned itself with the sexual revolution, albeit in a paradoxical reversal of perspective, to signal sexuality as a ring-fenced genre, a distinct, though separate, problematic. But, is this really the case? What other explanations may explain the presence of the Reichian clusters which signal political theatre's symptomatic engagement with revolutionary sexuality? What did the counter-culture and political theatre think was political about sex? Why did post-'68 political theatre preference sex over political or economic concerns? In summary, can the phenomenon of orgasmotheatre be considered as a form of political theatre when, traditionally, questions of sexuality in orthodox political circles have customarily been considered as personal, unscientific, and non-political?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.330 -333.

⁵⁷ As if to underline the threat his work posed to the political and social doxa Reich writes that his ideas were roundly attacked by everyone, 'the Marxists included'. *Function of the Orgasm*, p. 211.

Yes, it may, because as the informed Reichian cognoscenti maintained, sexual revolution cannot be detached from political or economic revolution. Reich warned that the demand for sexual asceticism in adolescents, as well as moulding them into sexually chaste subjects, also prepared them for *economic exploitation*, for to master one's own sexuality is to master personal rebellion *per se*.⁵⁸ The autonomous councilism of the OM, for instance, cannot achieve historical actuality if the very workers it configures as the revolutionary class have surrendered personal autonomy in their sexual lives. Put on a broader stage, in contradiction to orthodox Marxist theory which puts the wider proletariat in the vanguard of rebellion, workers will logically remain counter-revolutionary if they refuse command over their own micro means of production - the body - in self-managed regulation of physical pleasure. As Reich wrote, 'only an independent youth, acting without authoritarian discipline, and a sexually healthy youth, could, in the long run, master the extremely difficult task of the revolution'.⁵⁹

It is because of this interconnectedness that the sexual subjugation of the body is consistently interconnected with its exploitation in the industrial or economic sphere in post-'68 political drama. *Slag* equated the refusal of women to lie down 'under men' with the refusal of anyone, male-workers included, to go 'lying down for anyone' (*Slag* Scene 3). Barker's *Claw* postulated settling for an unsatisfying, loveless, and sexually-dead marriage - lying dutifully under one's husband - was concomitant with the working classes' sense of economic limits in post-war Britain. Mrs Biledew is happy with her 'relative richness' of 'handbags and crocodile shoes', while one of *Claws'* prostitutes sells/exchanges sex to own more things (*Claw* ACT 1/4). If sexual exploitation is homologous to industrial exploitation, the sex-workers in *The National Theatre* offer one of the most significant examples of this identity of struggle. Set within a period of increasing national unemployment, the play compared the lack of parts for women in the theatre with the lack of parts for women, and other workers, within capitalism and bourgeois society. It made this comparison by substituting an industrial interviewing situation for an interview within the performance arts of the sex-industry. Marie:

Last month I was seen in Dean street, in a club, performing. By some bloke. He saw me afterwards. Come to my office, Friday. So I did. He

⁵⁸ Reich, *Function of the Orgasm*, pp.175-6.

⁵⁹ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (1970), p. 212.

said, I've got this show I'm bringing in. A funny show. I'd like you in it. So I said, well, yes that's wonderful, what is it? Well, he said, the thing's a kind of satire, on the sexploit boom. It's called A Deeper Throat. What do I do, I said. Well, he said, don't worry, you don't have to sing or dance or anything, just do your thing, cos that did get my nuts off, did your thing, so sparky, spiky, quirky, spry. I said fuck off. So angry that – I'd fallen for that I-can-really-make-it bit...for which in others I'd reserved such scorn. And he said, that doesn't matter, cos there's hundreds more like you. But now it's different. Now there's thousands more like you.
(*The National Theatre Act 1*)

In *Claw* women are interviewed for the sex-industry as any other work. They have to 'show their thighs' and are asked if they can 'simulate an orgasm'. Bodies become brand names - 'Annabelle' 'Stacy' 'Rosy' 'Lindsay' - and these human commodities, the play proposed, are advertised and catalogued for their sexually stereotypical properties, 'bust, 36', 'hair red', 'long legs' and so on (*Claw Act 1/4 - 2/1*). In *Vampire*, abolished from the social community, Reuben and Joy's transportation from the pastoral Welsh countryside to the city, reflected their abstract sexual exodus from nature, their own natural history, and the migration of the historical peasantry and artisans from the countryside after the industrial revolution. Accordingly, Joy, like many other girls, and the wider notionally-alienated proletariat, has to 'put her legs in the air' to earn a living wage. In this performance the brothel was reconfigured as indeed a factory, a workplace peopled - like the crisp factory of *Weapons of Happiness* - by social outcasts, the working class, immigrants, and the disabled (*Vampire Act 1/2*).

Given the symbiotic relationship the political avant-garde assumed existed between sex and work, revolutionary political theatre maintained that the radical transformation of society must begin by paradoxically putting a sexual revolution *before* (or at least run alongside) any economic revolt. Contradicting orthodox Marxist theoretical arguments which envisaged revolution via industrialism or economics - the liberation of the means of production - post-'68 radical revolutionaries, and their allies in radical revolutionary theatre, therefore sought the liberation of the subject through the

liberation of the repressed biological body.⁶⁰ To continue to sideline sexuality as peripheral to revolution would have been practically the same as tolerating the exploitative transfer of the means of industrial production and economic exploitation from one social system (capitalism, say) to another (Stalinism, for example). This is why orgasmotheatre strove through education - or repulsive shock tactics - to fracture the spectator's character armour. It was perhaps anticipated that, embellished with a renewed natural self-confidence, based upon a rediscovered sexual potency, previously impotent spectators would rediscover *revolutionary potency*. Workers and spectators would no longer be led to the barricades by revolutionary theoretical rhetoric, but freed from original repression, refuse to work or live in the old mechanistic dutiful ways anti-sexual society dictated.

Orgastic potency was considered revolutionary and political because as a hypothetical 'natural law' driven by a notional biological essentialism, only it, and it alone, could authentically challenge outmoded cultural and industrial laws. In a post sexual-revolutionary society work would no longer be based upon blind obedience to the dictatorship of production, capital, or the state, but human needs. Orgasmotheatre therefore evidenced a new economy of sexuality in which the organic needs of the body were re-centred over the productive needs of the economy, namely: a *Sex-Economy*. The function of political theatre became a renewal of the radical socialist's concern with the circulation and exchange of sex; not commodities, currency, or raw materials. And, indeed, this is what post-'68 political theatre undertook. It moved its focus from the economy to the sexual economy, which is why we see dominant clusters of concern with sexuality in the period's drama.

There is a further logic in this reversal of perspective which put the economy of sex before - on a equal footing, at least - with other systemic struggles. As phenomenal evidence proves it is sexuality, not dry politics or economics, which has been traditionally embraced by the masses. Compared to the often apathetic response to dry political debates, Reich's public sex-meetings were well attended. Similarly, he pointed out that 'the entire politics of culture (film, novels, poetry, etc.) revolve around the sexual element, thrive on its renunciation in reality and its affirmation in the ideal'.⁶¹ Demonstrating a unity of purpose, we can make the case that including sexual problems or material in

⁶⁰ To make his point Reich claimed that within post-revolutionary industrial societies, the Soviet Union for example, production must be organised around the worker's cultural and sexual pleasure. Reich, *Function of the Orgasm*, p. 157.

⁶¹ Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 212.

its political remit was a pragmatic move by dramatists to make political theatre more revolutionary; sex functioned as a vehicle to attract rank and file support. Also, if, as Reich noted, the capitalist economy and advertising industry capitalise upon sex to sell consumer goods, political theatre recuperated sex *back* from an acquisitive capitalism, and returned it to revolutionary, not exploitative, ends.

Furthermore, transforming their focus from an economic to a sexual agenda allowed left-wing playwrights to harness their own medium to the political project of the wider new-left intelligentsia as they, too, shifted away from pure economics as the sole instrument of radical liberation.⁶² For example, although the old Marxist 'diamat' model of society (Dialectical Materialism) held that the economic base influences the social and this exerts pressure on the political superstructure, graphically we might represent it something like this: Economic base >> Social Structure >> Political Superstructure, as a revolutionary template it still maintained that they exhibit a residual *separateness*. By contrast political theatre theorists signalled that the economic, social, and political are intrinsically *connected*. Put differently, they were pointing out that all objects and spheres of practice - in this case the body and sexual activity - harbour an economic, social, and ideological dimension. By homology a concern with the control of the body or sexual consummations has a political, economic, and social relevance.

A new sex-economy held additional attraction to the political playwright because, if sexual exploitation is classless, by homology, economic exploitation was no longer restricted to one socio-economic stratum of the population. Homological to schizophrenia and the capitalist exploitation of the student, artist, and intellectual - sexual domination is culturally ubiquitous, classless. Everyone is a prostitute, selling their material bodies for money. To undertake any form of coercive work is to use, inevitably, aborted/diverted sexual energy. The radical playwright and theatre workers therefore claimed another important cultural rapprochement with the wider repressed population which, in a period where class was becoming an increasingly shaky concept, allowed them renewed political gravitas or *social relevance*. And since sexuality is always figured out in the Reichian field of theory as more prescient in proletarian cultures (they have more sex), consequently we can speak of another worker,

⁶² In *The Long Revolution* (London: Hogarth, 1961), Williams broadly argued that the New Left, too, must move beyond simple economic determinism - a political theory that regards economics as the main controlling and influential factor in society - and move towards a more complex understanding of the contemporary world.

intellectual rapprochement as the bourgeois theatre intelligentsia sought to go native. Ironically, in contrast to the negative 'proletarianisation of the world' we see in commodity relationships bemoaned by theatre workers against the spectacle (see Chapter 5 'The Society of the Spectacle'), radicals desired to be *more* proletarian, so saving the world, and their own selves, from bourgeois models of living, for this is what sexual repression, by logic, of course engenders.

Red Fascists

Whilst at first it might appear that *Baby Love*, *The National Theatre*, *Slag*, *Vampire*, and *Claw* are not political in a conventional sense, by reversing their perspective, revolution then love, to love then revolution, they are significant in that they advanced a different, though radical (and opportunist, perhaps), route to destroy established authoritarian revolutionary politics. For this new-generation of theatre workers, any subversion of political focus was welcome because, as we have seen in previous chapters, during this cultural phase a groundswell of dissatisfaction with traditional political and revolutionary organisations, particularly Stalinists, existed. Politically radical groups such as the SI associated the insistence upon painfully slow political reformism, and the appeal to 'reality' or political or economic 'realism', with a postponement of existential pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure, till after the revolution. 'Red Fascists', as Reich called them, put the body and sexuality out of sight. Reich, recorded that it was they he was always fighting, 'the economists in the socialist movement who, with their slogans about the "iron course of history" and the "economic factors," were alienating the very people whom they claim to be liberating'.⁶³ The struggle was such that Reich was expelled from the German Communist Party in 1933 for transferring political theory to sexual and mental campaigns - a struggle he called the 'practical politics of the people' - so dissipating energy which ought to be put into direct political action.⁶⁴ His personal struggle had modern import because, as we have noted, like the OM, post-'68 political theatre marked-out a field of position taking deeply suspicious of existent bullying or dogmatic bureaucratic political organisations. Sexualised-politics and a sexually-politicised theatre was therefore potentially revolutionary since, unlike economic class politics, it had severed its connection to existing

⁶³ Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 195.

⁶⁴ Rycroft, p. 12. Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 211.

political organisations, particularly the Stalinised variants. Reich-style politicking merely added further grist to the anti-oedipal theory of engineering a more desire-orientated radical political autonomy.

Slag provided a suitable analysis of red fascism through the dogmatic and theoretical socialist Joanne. Thinking in common with the economists she swears to:

Keep my body intact in order to register my protest against the way our society is run by men for men whose aim is the subjugation of the female and the enslavement of the working woman [...] all forms of sex I therefore deny myself in order to work towards the establishment of a truly socialist society. (*Slag* Scene1)

Yet rather than influence her potential political disciples to revolt, the performance suggested that her very political denial of the body, the suspension of biological pleasure until after the revolution, is actually divisive, undermining the sexual and wider revolutionary cause. Dramatically, Hare represented the dangers of red fascism through the bodies of the pupils, the potential revolutionary disciples of the red 'feminist', who slowly disappear *pace* the disinterested working-class masses. At the play's end no physical bodies are left to make the revolution because the intellectual (and gender) separatist refuted the importance of the sexualised body and its attendant pleasures - though she does teach masturbation. In an appeal to any residual character rebels in the audience the playwright warned 'your feminist appeals strike no chord in women and simply repel men' (*Slag* Scene 1). Claw in *Claw* presented a parallel critique in that the new breed of post-'68 sex-political *enragés* 'don't want to be like my old man or like the silly bleeders in the Y.C.L. all waiting, waiting, waiting till the time is right' (*Claw* Act 1/3). Like Nora and Claw, the message to old-school revolutionaries in the audience, was that they consequently abandon bureaucratic organisations like the Young Communist League (International Socialists, or such, in contemporary life) because traditional socialism historically 'squeezes the joy' out of the young (*Claw* Act 1/2). Kabak in Trevor Griffiths' *Occupations* (1970) and the fate of Josef Frank in *Weapons of Happiness* (1976) presented a comparable critique of a joyless red fascism, whilst Gramsci 'loves' and is 'loved' by the workers' for his lack of it.

Love and sexuality came, then, to be conceived as more revolutionary than orthodox socialism - the revolutionary metaphor par excellence - because, unlike the Freudian and Marcusean pleasure principle,⁶⁵ which demanded the renunciation of pleasure today for compensation in the future, Reich's theory of love and desire demanded that political immediacy, like the orgasm, be satisfied in the here and now. To proffer that pleasure must be foregone, postponed until a future revolutionary society had been established, would have been homologous to the political playwright stating that sexual pleasure must be deferred. Love therefore became a revolutionary force and a potent revolutionary metaphor, i.e. to be sexually potent is the same as being politically potent in a revolutionary situation. In *The Party*, the sexual 'impotence' of Griffiths' Shawcross was symbiotic to his, and the wider bourgeois left's, political impotence, a revolutionary incapacity the play evaluated. Correspondingly, to encourage or agitate a struggle for sexual satisfaction was to struggle for political release. Post-'68, the fight for sexual pleasure had to be elevated to the wider homological struggle for social pleasure. For political theatre to continue to accept the moral authority of the family, the oedipalising function of the father, and renounce natural 'primal' sexual rights would have been to accept social and political as well as sexual stasis. Post'68, sexual immobility became inextricably connected with revolutionary immobility. As Reich put it, 'Castrates are no fighters for Freedom'.⁶⁶ And, the SI believed this, too. Why else did the 'Strasbourg Pamphlet', a tract which it is said detonated the *événements* of May'68, begin with an assault on the poverty of the student's sex life, which led to the 'Battle of the Dormitories', and on to the 'Night of the Barricades'?

⁶⁵ Marcuse notes that, under the pull of the pleasure principle the human organism strives after happiness. To achieve this the subject must proceed to avoid unpleasure; seek to avoid pain, and achieve strong feelings of pleasure i.e. coitus. However, phylogentetically and ontogenetically, man is threatened primarily by his environment - the natural world. Marcuse argued that the history and character of the species is shaped by 'the struggle for existence' which initially takes place in a world too poor for the satisfaction of human needs without constant restraint, renunciation and delay. Faced with this 'scarcity' or '*ananke*', libido or sexual energy has to be reorganised and diverted from the satisfaction of bodily desire. See *Eros and Civilisation*, pp. 3-8, 132, & 138.

⁶⁶ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, (1970), p. 253.

Chapter 4: Culture

We sky pilots have been too far from the language of the people in times past – creates an unhealthy gulf between us and them. I make a practice of foul language on council estates brings you nearer to the people's guts.
Curate Plum, Yobbo Nowt.

The Masses, i.e. the non-ruling classes, have no reason to feel concerned with any aspects of a culture or an organisation of social life that have been developed not only without their participation or their control, but even deliberately against such participation or control... In the past every dominant class had its own art - for the same reason that a classless society will have none.
Situationist International, 1964.

Our programme is a cultural revolution through a total assault on culture, which makes use of every tool, every energy and every media we can get our collective hands on...our culture, our art, the music, newspapers, books, posters, our clothing, our homes, the way we walk and talk, the way our hair grows, and fuck and eat and sleep- it's all one message - and the message is Freedom.
John Sinclair, Ministry Of Information, White Panthers.

Introduction: Utilitarian Theatre - The Social Value of Pop

Music

After May'68, pop music came to the fore in making British political theatre radical. To appreciate how this might be written within the terms of the French situation we must return to one of the most fundamental aspects of the *événements*: a fresh approach to how radical political theory might be best communicated to the critical masses. For example, in his book *Obsolete Communism: The Left Wing Alternative* (1968) Daniel Cohn-Bendit observed that historically radical political theory had been 'written in a style which is not intended for the workers', in a form of communication 'they cannot understand'.¹ By contrast, he proposed that re-energized modern revolutionary movements must become skilled in translating the political language of the past 'into the language of today'.² In particular, Cohn-Bendit argued intellectual socialists must exploit extant contemporary *technological media*. If radicals could seize control of the TV or Radio - the technical means of production - because of their social accessibility, this would enable the widespread transmission of subversive ideology; revolutionary theory communicated en masse. Simultaneously, arresting the electronic means of communication from the State, inferred that, as hegemonic instruments of communication, TV or

¹ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism The Left Wing Alternative* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.13.

² Cohn-Bendit, p.108-9.

Radio would no longer sustain bourgeois mechanisms of power - the modern industrialised society Vaneigem bemoaned as the 'world of survival' - but be utilized for their democratic 'social value'.³

Cohn-Bendit's championing of popular media as appropriate instruments of political struggle coincided with other current theoretical writings. In the USA, for example, *The Drama Review* published Ralph Gleason's influential essay 'The Greater Sound' (1969). In this paper the performance theorist challenged radical theatre to realise the political 'power' of contemporary music. He argued that, in contrast to orthodox text based political theatre - a medium which, broadly speaking, spoke in the old dry language Cohn-Bendit critiques - 'rock music, spreading out from the centre with [Bob] Dylan, the Beatles and, the [Rolling] Stones, involves its audience in an even more fundamental confrontation with society... Rock music has involved young people as no other pop or elite art has ever done'.⁴ Although not strictly rock or pop, a perfect encapsulation of Gleason's argument can be evidenced in the politicised R 'n' B of the black activist, Marvin Gaye, an artist who transported a popular medium, soul music, from its low-cultural status (songs simply written about frustrated love or teenage infatuations), towards fields of reference predominantly associated with serious intellectual culture. Through ballads such as *What's Going On*, *Inner City Blues*, and *Mercy Mercy Me* Gaye synthesised popular music with anti-war comment, industrial exploitation, racial prejudice, and even environmental issues - "radiation in the sea, fish filled with mercury".⁵ In reaching millions through record buying or radio plays his music exposed young people, particularly proletarian youth, to leftfield radical views. And because popular music involved, rather than excluded, the masses - it communicated its message in a popular accessible form - Gaye's idiom demonstrated pop's socialist potential.

Sheila Rowbotham, for instance, recalls that, seeing Jimi Hendrix tearing up the American Flag 'accompanied by ear-bursting music exploding from the biggest speakers I had ever seen', shocked and mobilised a whole

³ Cohn-Bendit, p. 105.

⁴ Ralph Gleason, 'The Greater Sound', *TDR*, Vol 13, Summer, (1969), p.164. Castigating the political ineffectuality of theatre and other forms of performance to evolve radical political and cultural change, Gleason concluded his critique by evoking the 1968 manifesto of the Living Theater. Although they claimed to be 'in the vanguard of a new phenomenon in theatrical and social history...making experimental collective creations and exploring time space, minds, and bodies in manifold new ways', rock groups, he noted, 'have been doing this since 1965 and reaching an audience infinitely greater'. p.165.

⁵ Marvin Gaye, *Mercy Mercy Me*, Motown Records, 1972.

subculture into the realisation that 'music was no longer for dancing'.⁶ Meanwhile, Roland Muldoon of the theatre group Cast (Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre) recalls that, enchanted with this new situation, 'we wanted a style that would make our plays come across like rock and roll. Our great heroes were the guitarists and the saxophonists who won the appreciation of our generation'.⁷ The fact that companies called themselves 'groups' gives the game away further that collectives began to conceptualise themselves as connected with contemporary rock bands. Pip Simmons, for one, saw his theatre group 'as a rock 'n' roll band', rather than an elitist theatre ensemble.

Synchronically with other British counter-cultural radicals and theatre groups, political playwrights were also becoming increasingly aware that many pop groups had developed politicised lyrics and critical positions that were 'literate and worth listening to', and so facilitated the opportunity to contact a mass audience.⁸ John McGrath picks out the Beatles and Loving Spoonful and, so thinking in common with Cohn-Bendit and Gleason, realised pop and rock harnessed a latent *communicative value*. Put differently, political dramatists realised the potential 'propaganda effect' of electrified popular pop/rock; they identified its *utilitarian* or *social use value*.⁹ McGrath's 7:84 Scotland accordingly initiated a process which sought to re-shape political plays and theatre by roughly assuming the cultural forms pop or rock concerts displayed. Consequently, certain members of 7:84 Scotland who did not already, learnt to play an instrument and penned pop songs with political content, both of which they played in the space-time of their own performance event.¹⁰ In *The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil* (1973) actors donned the paraphernalia of Country and Western groups, cowboy hats, checked shirts, various rhinestone adornments, whilst performing a pop song that told of the colonisation of the Scottish Highlands by multi-national oil companies, rather than heartbreak or

⁶ Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream, Remembering the Sixties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. 132.

⁷ Roland Rees, *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre* (London: Oberon Books, 1992), p. 69.

⁸ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (London: Eyre Methuen, London, 1981), p. 52.

⁹ I am using the terms utility or propaganda here in the sense that both axioms refer to the importance of what art can do, its *use value* as a political tool, rather than simply remaining music for music's sake, or, as the Marxist Plekhanov put it, 'art for arts sake'. See G.V. Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 11. For example John McGrath says when he put on plays at Liverpool's Everyman with a 'widespread use of popular songs and electric rock band, 'this was one of the most successful shows ever on Merseyside. The working class, young and old, flocked to the Everyman'. See McGrath, *Good Night Out*, p. 54.

¹⁰ John McGrath, *The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil* (London: Methuen Drama, 1980), p. xi.

love, the stock subject of Country and Western music. In other segments 7:84 adapted the stylised format of the mid-seventies glam-rock band. But instead of reproducing the trashy pop music of the Bay City Rollers, "shangalang...shangalang...shangalang", or the Rubettes, "sugar bay love, sugar bay love" the company changed the lyrical content to "Conoco, Amoco, Shell-Esso, Texaco, British Petroleum, yum, yum" (*The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil* Act 1).

Concomitant with the pop format of *The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil*, two years on 7:84's *Yobbo Nowt* (1975) transmitted its Marxist/Situationist theory via pop-songs. McGrath put over Reich's philosophy of sexual liberation in the song *Getting It When Young*, "Love is lovely if you get it when you're young...make your choice and take your pill...and when you're ready for it take your fill" (*Yobbo Nowt* Act 1); the politics of the Occupation Movement, particularly those which propagated the desirability of radical political autonomy, were conveyed in the two lines, "Now we've come to the end of our story, not much happened, that is true - if you want an end, we're sorry, the rest is up to you" (*Yobbo Nowt* Act 2); an assault upon the 'society of the spectacle' was relayed with this pop tune:

The world you watch on the news (Ev'ry day)
in the press and radio
is a world we pick and choose (For our pay)
A world it's safe to show

For the media men with camera and pen
Know *what* you all should see,
So off they go and find it, then –
It's simple as BBC. (*Yobbo Nowt* Act 2)

By inserting politics within pop, then, although deadly serious about revolutionary politics, the political theatre of 7:84 no longer relied on dialectical debate or dry theoretical speeches to formulate its socialist revolutionary meanings. For, like the enragés who sought to spread radical philosophy through the use of catchy slogans during May'68 - because they were snappy and short - 7:84 realised that revolutionary political meaning can be easily

communicated in the 'neatness of expression of a good lyric or tune'.¹¹ Moreover, the pop format possessed added use value. Carrying political content into the consciousness of the spectator, repetitive and catchy pop tunes circulated revolutionary theory within the mind of the inculcated listener, and so re-evaluated pop music for its insistent political resonance.

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of political theatre's utilisation of pop/rock music to communicate revolutionary socialism, though, was that, if playwrights assumed the proletarian class was the class that 'may well be making revolution',¹² it followed that, to reach this potential radical class, one must look at the language and form of working class entertainment.¹³ To reshape the argument, political theatre used popular music as a consonant practical means of contacting the class it wanted to influence in a form it understood, in the same way that one must translate languages into the language of one's interlocutor to be comprehended. A better analogy might be that 7:84 sought to broadcast through a more common *frequency*, making political music which the proletariat would hopefully tune into - politics communicated in a style of mediation *they* preferred.

This pop-theatre strategy, then, was Situationist in that, as Cohn-Bendit rightly articulated, SI theory required that political theory be communicated in *working class forms*, the adoption of the comic strip being one other indicative strategy, for its transparency and *directness*. As Gleason concluded, by the late sixties, having rejected bourgeois culture, through rock and pop, young people, particularly proletarian youth, were at last 'being spoken to by revolutionists in words they understand, in a style that makes those words acceptable, an invisible medium that old professional politicians have not yet picked up on'.¹⁴ Therefore, it was no longer orthodox political communication that made this pop-theatre radical, but the importation of 'The 12-inch long-playing vinylite phonograph record, with its half-hour to 45 minutes of songs' which became the 'intellectual time bomb'.¹⁵ Under homological conditions, rock music appealed to the political playwright because, equivalent to the *enragés* use of graffiti, the genre of rock/pop spoke in the very idiom of the disenfranchised and disinterested younger generation, whilst possessing the potential to communicate political meaning to a far wider audience, in both numbers and

¹¹ McGrath, p. 55.

¹² McGrath, p. 25.

¹³ McGrath, p. 22.

¹⁴ Gleason, p. 160.

¹⁵ Gleason, p. 161.

social class, than other restrictive and elitist artefacts, notably theatre. And because playwrights deployed revolutionary rock as a utilitarian tactic, we can say that pop/rock music became accepted for its democratic *use value*. By taking control of a technology of communication - the phonographic disc - political theatre reinstated the relation of technological art to social life within its own field of struggle.¹⁶ As the British Situationist John Sinclair, for example, put it, if the aim of the radical counter-culture was to instigate a total revolution of every sphere of everyday life, by homology it had to make 'use of every tool, every energy and every media we can get our collective hands on'.¹⁷ The link between Situationism and pop/rock is as straightforward and pragmatic as this: music grew to be a practical tool in the service of revolution.¹⁸

Demonstrating: The Voice of the People

At the heart of this fusion of pop and theatre, however, lie alternative Situationist readings and different interpretations of why political theatre manufactured such an aesthetic alliance. To be sure, in later productions, *Gotcha* (1976) is a case in point, Barry Keeffe's insertion of the Thunder Clap Newman track *Something in the Air* pointed out the forthcoming - and necessary - insurrection of the wider working-class *enragé*, 'the Kid'. Looked at from the previous perspective the playwright was merely exploiting pop/rock in an essentially utilitarian way, even though the play selected existent rather than imitative tracks. For example, the Rolling Stones' *Get off My Cloud* and *Satisfaction* underpinned the play's analysis of the broader social dissatisfaction of British working-class youth, a discontent neatly communicated in two lines, "Hey you get offa my cloud" and "I can't get no satisfaction". The betrayal of working-class children by 'socialist' comprehensive education was narrated by means of "this old heart of mine been broke a thousand times" or "I don't want to talk about it how you broke my heart"; two pithy expressions borrowed from contemporaneous pop records: *This Old Heart of Mine* and *I Don't Want to Talk*

¹⁶ The Marxist Plekhanov, for one, argued that 'the idea of "art for art's sake" is strange in our times... All human activities must serve mankind. The function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness'. Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life*, p. 5.

¹⁷ John Sinclair, in Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991), see intro.

¹⁸ To suggest there existed an unproblematic community of struggle between pop and politics is always going to hold contradictions. Rock and pop are products of the same capitalist society socialists oppose. However, I will deal with this anomaly later through an analysis of Hare's and Poliakoff's residual good culturism.

About, two tracks featured on Rod Stewart's *Atlantic Crossing* album (*Gotcha* Scenes 1, 2, 3).¹⁹

However, where these gestures differed from 7:84's pragmatic concern with utility, as if playwrights should put radical theory onto cans of baked beans or beer-bottle labels if it got their point across, in Keeffe's trilogy pop records indicated to the audience, *pace* Cohn-Bendit and Gleeson, their own worth as socialised technology; usable modes of communication independent of their private retrieval by political theatre. To convey the revolutionary utopianism of May'68 with the Beatles *Here Comes the Sun* in preference to literate playwriting or imitative pop lyrics was to *elevate* pop to the cultural equivalent of a broadsheet, film, or a poem. That is to say, Keeffe demonstrated that pop, too, could accomplish the expression of social attitudes, record disgruntlement, and advocate political confidence. His plays showed that vinyl pop records are capable of carrying cultural and political comment, can communicate the common 'structures of feeling' above and beyond the possibilities of their borrowing by the utilitarian dramatist. To be precise, Keeffe's work placed popular recordings within the drama event so that, as specific articulations of the field of music, records could be revalidated as radical and revolutionary artefacts in their *own right*. When in *Gotcha* the May'68 anthem *Street Fighting Man*²⁰ 'blasted out' before and after 'the Kid' threatens to kill his middle-class teachers by igniting a tank of petrol, the track correlated the particular content of the song with the dramatic locus (the 'Kid' was a 'street fighting man') - but the refrain also signalled the connection between current popular music *per se* and its influence upon the actual revolutionary scene. By including the presence of aggressive music in the drama, Keeffe flagged its radical propaganda potential. Viewed from this standpoint, Keeffe's inclusion of pop invited the (bourgeois) spectator to reverse his/her perspective on the esteem

¹⁹ Pop music informed much of David Edgar's dramatic structure. The Stranglers' *No More Heroes* and the Byrds' *Hey Mr Tambourine Man* - and several other tracks - featured in *Mary Bames*, whilst the singing of *Baby Love* by the Supremes and the Beatles' *Eleanor Rigby* informed the dramatic action of *Baby Love*.

²⁰ Everywhere I hear the sound of marching, charging feet boy
'Cause summer's here and the time is right for fighting in the street boy

So what can a poor boy do, 'cept to sing
For a rock n' roll band, cause in sleepy
London town there's no place for a Street Fighting Man
They said the time is right for a palace revolution
But where I live the game to play is compromise solution.

(*Gotcha* Intro /Scene 2) Mick Jagger, 'Street Fighting Man', 1969. For an insight into the political significance of rock/pop during May'68, see Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Collins, 1987), p. 163, 222, & 250.

within which society, particularly political art, normally configures pop as a form of negative culture. In its own way, then, *Gotcha* let the audience see how popular proletarian art can play an important role, not only within the material cultural event of the performance, but, more importantly, the public domain.

Moreover, although the broadly university-educated political playwrights could not by definition and function claim to be members of the industrial working-class, joining forces with, broadly speaking, proletarian *culture* established a wider gesture of social solidarity. As Farren puts it, if one was to align oneself with the working class politically, post'68 it became imperative that its everyday forms of expression should be valued as valid forms of protest and agitation. This is a crucial point being offered here. For Farren's comment sheds new light on the positive promotion of working class culture by post-'68 playwrights. It also moves the analysis on from conceptualising political theatre's deployment of pop in a purely defensive model - sticking up for the historical teleology of an abstract revolutionary proletariat through the medium of pop/rock culture - towards a theoretical defence of that culture and class *per se*. Because in standing up for proletarian culture, by homology, political theatre looked to establish the right of popular culture, the people's culture, to speak in *proxy* for the voice of the wider excluded proletariat. Homological to the physical occupation of fenced-off public spaces we see radically implemented throughout May'68, including proletarian forms of expression within the time/space of the performance amounted to a certain aggressive symbolic take-over of elitist theatre by the playwright for the physical and culturally absent workers. The inclusion of popular music became a political ploy to suggest that the wider proletariat had the right to be heard (allowed time and space), within the wider cultural sphere. Playing Rod Stewart or Rolling Stones records within the time/space of the event - the pop and rock artefacts which blasted out of transistor radios in factories and many other contemporary proletarian spaces - transformed the hitherto elitist bourgeois theatre into a notionally more communal space. Thus, post'68, political theatre became occupied with the authentic everyday cultural choices of the workers, not merely abstract representations of that class. With this most radical of gestures, post-'68 political theatre activated a certain vicarious occupancy or cultural participation in the performance event, by the working class, *through its culture*. By association this reconsideration of proletarian culture amounted to a symbolic reassessment of the working-class subjectivity, too. The existential identity of

the working-class found itself socially embellished via the cultural elevation of its own dominant and attractive pop culture.

Cultural Graffiti: The Defacement of Theatre

To comprehend political theatre's insertion of pop and rock music within the terms of cultural solidarity, invites the impression that a tentative, though benign, socio-cultural rapprochement was afoot. But if culture is slowly emerging here as a *metaphor for social relations*, peaceful coexistence may also need to be reconfigured in more hostile confrontational terms. This is because, purchased by millions of ordinary everyday people, the wholesale mass consumption of pop records indicated the numerical power of proletarian culture, and, more importantly, the *physical presence* and revolutionary potential of the working-class majority to outnumber the broader structures and hierarchies of the State. SI communiqués, for instance, suggested that to form graphic mental images of hierarchical power one only has to draw up a list of individual names and theories which dominate the social landscape.²¹ Away from the social sphere, the residual domination of dramatic space by stock-in-trade bourgeois cultural artefacts such as the Classics, Ibsen, Shakespeare, even Brecht, in cultural terms marks out an ordinance survey of the bourgeoisies' *cultural power*. Vice versa, when political plays built a performative structure from a long list which included Gary Glitter, The Beatles, Amen Corner, Suzi Quattro, Rolling Stones, Mary Wilson, Rod Stewart, New Seekers, or Glitter Band, they forcefully reversed the template of influence, and overran, like the street demonstration, bourgeois spatial and cultural dominance with the culture of the people. And, if we juxtapose the visual and audible threat of the street demonstration with its sheer numbers (see figure 4), the statistical supremacy of pop records became a metaphor for the real physical threat a dissenting working-class critical mass could pose to other spheres of bourgeois life. Structurally comparable to how the Grosvenor Square demonstration threatened the social order by announcing a counter-cultural threat to the social landscape, reclaiming the streets for the social whole, here playwrights transposed the ethos of the demonstration into a call to fight State power within the statistical walkways of culture. In this new politics, then, cultural prominence

²¹ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, (London: Rebel Press, 1994), p.144.

came to stand in for proletarian social power. Cultural struggle found a homological alliance with the extant social struggle.

It is within this emergent conflict in the field of culture - the struggle within genres - that this newfound colonisation of bourgeois theatre by pop-artefacts must be reconsidered and understood. In *A Good Night Out*, for instance, McGrath wrote:

Middle-class theatre-goers see the presence of music generally as a threat to seriousness...unless of course it is opera, when it is different. Big musicals, lush sounds and cute tunes are O.K. in their place but to convey the emotional heart of a genuine situation in a pop song is alien to most National Theatre goers.²²

By contrast, 'Working-class audiences like music in shows, live and lively, popular, tuneful and well-played. They like beat sometimes, more than the sounds of banks of violins, and they like melody above all'.²³ Given this irreconcilable dichotomy, by displacing the high-cultural forms of bourgeois culture with the unwanted sound of pop or rock music, 7:84's cultural interventions became political, 'symbolic of the people's voice and struggle'.²⁴ For instance, when the loud, and often figuratively fierce, low-culture of popular music occupied the time and space of the field of bourgeois theatre, radical playwrights declared their political challenge to middle-class property and also its exclusive aesthetic praxis. Keeffe's *Gem* (1975) is a particularly keen example of this confrontation. Comparable to the unwanted sound of the disorderly street-protest or factory-workers' strike, by including the sound of electric guitars, rock beats, and drums, along with the trashy pop lyrics of Showaddywaddy, Gary Glitter or Suzi Quattro, Keeffe presented a perceptible, though symbolic, challenge to bourgeois physical hegemony, namely, its cultural power (*Gem* Scenes 1,2,3). Taking the examples I have so far provided as indicative (they represent a wider selection of pop-theatre clusters within post-'68 drama), the case can be made that political theatre strategically repositioned pop music, and, brought the culture of the masses back to the cultural centre and centres of culture. Moreover, in raising issues around its

²² McGrath, pp. 55-56.

²³ McGrath, p. 55.

²⁴ McGrath, p. 64.

inclusion/exclusion, this indicated a new area of potential social and political struggle.

This repositioning of proletarian culture, however, also announced a more radical philosophical and aesthetic divergence. Whilst it is true the content of orthodox bourgeois political plays broadly talked *about* radical politics, pop-plays used the materiality of their cultural structure to assert that socialist struggle must also take place through the *particular form of the drama*. Shaped differently, political theatre had woken to the fact that to communicate political meaning - the revolutionary need for the workers to bring about the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', displacing the existent ruling class - one must first of all destroy its culture, that is, indicate the bourgeois class's social superfluity by instigating its *cultural absence*, by way of a thoroughgoing *assault upon its culture*.²⁵

The contemporary turn towards an all out assault upon bourgeois culture, over the economic, political or social, can best be comprehended through the historical lens of Marx and Engels early political theory. In *The German Ideology* (1846) they argued that

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force [...] hence among other things [they] rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of ideas in their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.²⁶

For Marx and Engels, the bourgeois epoch, built necessarily upon the divisions of labour, pictures a society *necessarily* characterised by its separation into hierarchical *classes*. At the top of the structure reside bourgeois industrialists, intellectuals, writers, and artists. Placed below the bourgeoisie reside the wider proletariat, workers, and peasants. Reflecting hierarchical society's economic condition, the culture of structured societies gets divided in terms of class, too. The forms of art belonging to the ruling class become *high* culture whilst

²⁵ Home, *The Assault on Culture*. Home points that one of the most original potent aspects of the SI was that, although made up of artists, writers, architects, philosophers, sculptors etc, it developed as 'a "political", and not just a "cultural" organisation', p. 31.

²⁶ Frederick Engels & Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994), pp. 64-65.

proletarian art finds itself - by comparison - *low*, or, in extremis, not classed as art or culture at all.

Having a firm understanding of Marxist theory - albeit in a 'non-dogmatic' way - the SI realised that, to confront the existent power inherent in class society, subjects must fight power, not only in the economic field or work place, but in the homological field of *culture*.²⁷

To the question, Why have we promoted such an impassioned regrouping in this cultural sphere whose present reality we reject? The answer is: Because culture is the center of meaning of a society without meaning...and the reinvention of a project of generally transforming the world must also and first of all be posed on this terrain. *To give up demanding power in culture would be to leave that power to those who now have it. We know quite well that the culture to be overthrown will really fall only with the totality of the socio-economic structure that supports it. But without waiting any longer, the Situationist International intends to confront it in its entirety, on every front.*²⁸

The Situationists, though, were not suggesting that workers take over the existent means and forms of cultural production, simply replacing bourgeois cultural administrators with proletarian executives, leaving the dominant or residual culture itself *unchanged*, but that radical cultural revolutionaries must *destroy culture per se*.²⁹

²⁷ Karl Korsch, 'A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Marxism', <http://www2.cddc.vt.edu/bps/CF/korsch.html>

²⁸ Ken Knabb, ed, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 61. *my italics

²⁹ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p.18. A telling illustration of this radical mindset is the rather surprising attitude of the Situationists to the Marxist, Bertholt Brecht. Brecht, they thought, displayed an 'unfortunate respect for culture, as defined by the ruling class'. This was unforgivable for the SI because to continue to work within existent bourgeois cultural models, paradoxically displaying a residual respect for Shakespeare and the Classics, Brecht's cultural respect was equivalent to advertising an implicit respect for that whole way of life. Far from revolutionary, Brecht merely displayed his return to a dated and ineffectual aesthetics, and implicitly supported a sentimental world in which the same sorts of tastes and relations are constantly repeated. By homology to leave bourgeois culture in place as the dominant means of expression amounts to the socialist playwright implicitly suggesting that other aspects of an idealised revolutionised society be left untouched; the gesture clearly counter-revolutionary. By contrast, like dadaism (an avant-garde tradition from which they, too, ironically borrow heavily), the SI aimed to deliver 'a mortal blow to the traditional conception of culture' *SI Anthology*, p 9 & 18. Agreeing with the Situationists, McGrath argues that Brecht's Berliner Ensemble retained many of the forms and structures of bourgeois theatre, highlighting (and conspicuously exhibiting) Brecht's artistic competence and compliance with, and within, received bourgeois artistic production. He was, he says 'having it both ways', working 'by choice' within bourgeois commercial theatre. In this sense Brecht was simply going along with the cultural 'intellectual' appropriation and control of the theatre by the middle-classes. Thus, in effect, leaving intact the

The Situationist confrontation with the bourgeois state, inside the 'sanctuary of culture', can be illustrated well in two exemplary gestures.³⁰ In the first example SI activists - in an act of 'culture smashing' - broke the 'revered' stained glass window *Wedding of the Virgin*, a piece made by the Italian artist Raphael (1483 -1520). In attacking this particular 'work of art' the Situationists quite literally desecrated a hallowed high-cultural artefact. The act of destruction demonstrated their disrespect for bourgeois culture. At the same time, by smashing-up the cultural property of the ruling class, the SI's gesture amounted to a protest against broader bourgeois hegemonic political power. The terms of reference for political and social contestation thus became transposed as the SI shifted protest from the economic to the cultural sphere. Further Situationist dissent can be evidenced when the SI pinned up paintings by the Italian Situationist Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio (1902-64). In contrast to the cultural hegemony and aesthetic hagiography residually bestowed upon Renaissance or Classical art, Pinot-Gallizio displayed his 'artwork' upon a common street wall, not in a gallery. Moreover, having brought down art to the level of the everyday - the newly created situation resembled a street market and the artwork had been printed like curtain material upon large rolls of cloth - the Situationists proceeded to sell art-by-the-metre. Sold by linear quantities, and removed from its hierarchical context (the art-house or gallery), the SI transposed elitist art into a simple *everyday* consumable item, widely available (to the masses) to be bought or rejected like a pound of potatoes.³¹

With these subversive activities in mind, we can gain a fresh perspective upon political theatre's fervent inclusion of popular forms of expression in the performance event. The inclusion of proletarian art no longer symbolised physical contestation - the cultural intimidation I outline in the culture-as-demonstration-model - but came to be about the adulteration of bourgeois culture, *per se*. Rather than accepting the ritualised practices or collective

belief amongst the working-class that theatre is not a space or practice in which they belong (see McGrath, *A Good Night Out*, pp. 41- 43.) Arnold Wesker and his trilogy *Roots* (1960), *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1960), and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* (1960) are perhaps an anglicised example of a left-wing dramatist who sought to bring high culture to and for the masses.

³⁰ *SI Anthology*, p.323. Theoretically the SI's idea of cultural sanctification echoes Bourdieu's theory of cultural, political, and social 'consecration'. See Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Chapter 4: 'Rites of Institution'.

³¹ At the same time, Situationist conferences decreed that, along with museums and art galleries, art critics should be smashed as the determining guardians of bourgeois ideology, language, and customs; what Raymond Williams would call 'residual' cultural tastes. See Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, pp. 48-49. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 122.

disciplines of revered drama, the post-'68 pop-play aimed to undermine and subvert the very concept of cultural taste by importing, cutting, and pasting 'everyday' pop music - the delineated low culture/non-culture of the masses - onto and within what the Situationists would call the dead culture of bourgeois art. For sure in *Gotcha*, *Gem*, and his later piece *Getaway* (1977) Keffe demanded that real records be played, tracks contemporaneous with the period. Pop songs therefore located the audience in the common abstract world of the three plays, working-class Britain in the early 1970s. But in reality Keffe incorporated proletarian 'chart' music to purposefully spoil the lustre of theatre, besmirching its high-status with the culture of the commoners. For example, the score for the final scene of *Gotcha* was achieved by playing the complete side of the Rod Stewart album I cited before, rather than classical or avant-garde music. Equally, the trilogy took its title - the sign by which it inserted itself into the space of high-culture - from a track on the Rolling Stones LP *Let It Bleed* (1969). Produced in the same period as *Yobbo Nowt*, *Gotcha*, and *Gem* Stephen Poliakoff included (as do whole clusters of post-'68 dramas) the Jagger/Richards May'68 anthem *Street Fighting Man* in his play *City Sugar* (1975). The play's 'prologue' involved a DJ 'fading down' Amen Corner's 1968 hit *If Paradise Was Half as Nice* into *The Proud One* by American teen idols The Osmonds (*City Sugar* Act 1).³² The logic of cultural de-sanctification is palpable in another 1975 production, David Hare's *Teeth 'n' Smiles* (1975). Although operating within the 'abstract register', the construction of a 'symbolised other space', it challenged bourgeois socio-cultural hegemony by transforming the material stage of the prestigious Royal Court with the presence of electric guitars, drums, microphones and amplifiers, as such the theatre became remade into a bona fide 'everyday' rock venue. As the audience arrived, Hare brought performance cachet 'down to earth' by offering the paying spectator a 'concrete' live gig, not a piece of exalted 'abstract' high-culture³³ (*Teeth 'n' Smiles* Scene 1). (see figure14). In *Yobbo Nowt* and *The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil*, as we have seen, John McGrath's 7:84 Scotland wove live rock music and pop songs within the fabric of the drama. Unrecognisable as extant bourgeois theatre, the company destroyed its

³² Following Keffe's example, Poliakoff's later play, *Strawberry Fields* (1977), also took its title from a well-known pop track, in this case one written by The Beatles.

³³ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996), see, 'The Abstract and the Concrete', pp.16-20.

performance events for the elitist theatregoer by making an aesthetic that 'sounded' ordinary.³⁴

Viewed from a Bourdieuan perspective, then, the political and aesthetic significance of political theatre's involvement with cultural desanctification can be best understood as exemplifying its radical attempt to reverse the effects of what he calls 'symbolic violence'.³⁵ The concept of symbolic violence is pertinent here because the Situationists' criticism of elite and received culture was underpinned by the negative 'violent' signifying effects they believed cultural 'distinction' or the possession of 'symbolic capital' wreaks upon one form of cultural practice - and social group - by its relation with its apposite hierarchical other. For high culture not only presupposes a low culture, but *distinguishes* itself against and within a 'symbolic relation of power' dependent upon the aggressive denigration of its opposite.³⁶ In the field of western culture, for example, what appears upon the bourgeois stage has meaning and value, that which originates from more common mediums of expression - TV, radio, a working man's club, or pop concert - falls into vulgar cultural insignificance.

Value always arises from deviation, *deliberate or not*, with respect to the most widespread usage, 'commonplaces', 'ordinary sentiments', 'trivial phrases', 'vulgar' expressions, 'facile style'. In the uses of language as in life styles [culture], all definition is relational. Language that is... 'well chosen', 'elevated', 'lofty', 'dignified' or 'distinguished' contains a negative reference (the very words used to name it show this) to 'common' 'everyday', ordinary, 'spoken', 'colloquial', 'familiar' language and, beyond this, to 'popular', 'crude', 'coarse', 'sloppy', 'loose', 'trivial', uncouth'... The oppositions from which this series is generated, and which, being derived from the legitimate language, is organised from the standpoint of the dominant users...³⁷

³⁴ A concern with cultural de-sanctification particularly pervaded the earlier post-'68 aesthetics of Snoo Wilson's *Pignight* (1971) and his *Blowjob* (1971), a piece which discarded orthodox epilogue for an eponymous end of show pop/rock song *Mr Blowjob*. Six years on, performed at the Traverse Theatre Edinburgh, Howard Brenton's *Hitler Dances* (1977) recruited not only an accomplished acting company, but had its very own pop group, 'Bread, Love and Dreams'. Again, scenes were scored with chart-like pop music or lyrics, not renaissance-drama asides or soliloquies; although Brenton does, it must be said, use asides and soliloquies in many of his other plays: *Epsom Downs* (1977) and *Magnificence* (1973) which I reference in Chapter 5.

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 51-52.

³⁶ Bourdieu, *Language*, p. 238.

³⁷ Bourdieu, *Language*, p. 60.

By reversing the relational logic of cultural distinction Bourdieu highlights, pop-plays fundamentally attempted to return this violence back towards the institution, and 'smash-up' the modes of expression of the dominant theatre, and, by homology, the prestige of the State. In fact it is the return of the vulgar which marks out the political and aesthetic import of cultural destruction. Hence theatre spaces, even the sub-cultural theatre, reverberated with the vulgar *cultural accent* of the proletariat. In the non-abstract register, post'68, theatre spaces therefore suffered audible cultural vandalism; high-art spoilt and desecrated by the sound of working-class culture. By playing pop tunes before, after, or during the intervals of the performance - like graffiti - Keffe, for one, critically 'sprayed' a disturbing brand of proletarian cultural noise across the face of the normally untroubled drama event. Playing Rod Stewart or Gary Glitter during the interval was reminiscent of scribbling a moustache on the Mona Lisa, a *de-facement* of theatre as art. In point of fact, pop music interludes are generally found in the proletarian home, workplace, night-life, pubs, and, in particular, football matches, not at the theatre. Whereas in Keffe's theatre, prologues, intervals, and epilogues were audibly comparable to pre-kick-off, half-time and full-time at 'the game', filled by the pop-tunes or chart hits of the day, not a glass of wine and polite conversation. In opposition to the intimidated pseudo *enragé* - the class-warrior Kev, who turns his transistor radio off at the sight of the theatre audience in the opening scene of *Gem* - Keffe kept the music on loud and proud. The audience were thus confronted with a worker's culture, an aesthetic which had come to occupy and challenge their own cultural zone. The correlation between football and theatre is not fanciful speculation, either. McGrath quite clearly talked about his generation's need to reinvent 'a theatre of the terraces'.³⁸ Henceforth, structurally comparable to the gallery turned into the market place, through plays like *Yobbo Nowt*, *The Cheviot*, *The Stag And The Black*, *Black Oil*, *Gem*, *Gotcha*, and *Teeth 'n' Smiles*, political playwrights sought to bring theatre down to the level of the football match, its pretensions to elitism vandalised. That is, post-'68 political playwrights appropriated popular philistine aesthetic forms - those of the hooligan - for their own acts of disrespectful social deviance, subversion, and cultural vandalism, so destroying theatre in the same violent way they believed destruction should be wreaked upon the wider bourgeois state in comparable gestures of *cultural de-sanctification*.

³⁸ McGrath, p. 104.

Creating Situationist Situations: Theatre *Dérive*

Underlying post-'68 theatre's apparent wilful cultural destruction, however, lay the dialectically opposed corresponding ambition to *create*. Expressed in terms of SI theory, a philosophy which coincidentally maintained that cultural destruction had by its own perverse logic to be creative, political theatre sought to destroy bourgeois theatre only to rebuild it anew. Cultural desanctification was only the first act in a rebellion against the socio-cultural establishment. Having destroyed extant modes of drama, culturally politicised dramatists set about manufacturing new, dramatic situations of their own. In keeping with SI politics, and paraphrasing its call for a new art of contestation, we might call these alternative dramatic situations 'contestatory expressions'.³⁹ Contestatory expressions lie at the heart of any Situationist aesthetics because, in dialectical opposition to Jean Paul Sartre's sometimes nihilistic concept of the 'situation'⁴⁰ - the unchangeable existential cultural and physical world one is born into - Situationism maintains that the very essence of original radical activity must be rebellion against the socio-cultural *given*.

What does the word "situationist" mean? It denotes an activity that aims at *making* situations as opposed to passively *recognizing* them in academic or other separate terms... We replace existential passivity with the construction of moments of life, and doubt with playful affirmation.... Since the individual is defined by his situation he wants the power to create situations worthy of his desires.⁴¹

A brief précis of the SI's approach to Town Planning might help illustrate the group's own creative ethos and also aid our understanding of how the contestatory expressions of political theatre realised a structural coincidence with SI activity.

The Situationists argued that modern subjects exist, not only in a rigid oedipalised culture, but also in inflexible architectural environments, planned, controlled, and regulated *situations*. Doors, large gates or certain social areas forbid entry within certain spaces, institutions, and physical environments. Signs

³⁹ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ Sartre argues that 'Far from being able to modify our situation at our whim, we seem to be unable to change ourselves. I am not "free" either to escape the lot of my class, of my nation, of my family, or even to build up my own power or my fortune or to conquer my most insignificant appetites or habits'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 'Freedom and Facticity: The Situation', p. 481.

⁴¹ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 138.

such as 'Private Club', 'Authorised Personnel Only', 'Do Not Enter', even 'Theatre', not only control how we move through urban surroundings, but how we feel and *experience* society and social spaces at large. In opposing controlling environments the Situationists argued that one must create new psychic experiences and situations by employing or practicing the *dérive*. In the first instance, Sadie Plant points out, 'to *dérive* was to notice the way in which certain areas, streets, or buildings resonate with states of mind, inclinations and desires'.⁴² To *dérive*, was also 'very much a matter of using an environment for one's own ends', and so revealing the possibilities for the construction of alternative 'situations, the manipulation of environments, and the creation of atmospheres'.⁴³ For example, a very straightforward way to resist restrictive or alien environments was to follow the Situationists' belief that cities, social spaces, and cultural environments should be explored by inner-city explorers who would wander or *dérive* - literally 'drift' - across and into alien and socio-culturally closed quarters of a cityscape, particularly proletarian areas. In this way an adventure would entail a confrontation or crossover into different cultures and social classes. Or, alternatively, mobile houses would move between landscapes reconstructed with a 'happy', 'sinister', or 'bizarre' quarter. These new diverse areas and activities would thus respond to a diversity of human emotions and social realities, but also spatially and culturally *disorientate* their practitioners and inhabitants. Disorientation was not craved for its own sake, however, 'but as a means of showing the concealed potential of experimentation, pleasure, and play in everyday life'.⁴⁴

In Britain we can observe the *dérive* at play in the newly constructed spatial situations the radical counter-culture carved out of their own given locations. For instance, at the 1968 launch of the magazine *IT*, held at the Roundhouse London - borrowed from Arnold Wesker's Centre 42 - activists converted an old dank cavernous railway winding station into a thoroughly unrecognisable social space. By simply erecting a stage made from scaffold poles upon which steel bands or other pop and rock groups could perform, the space was subverted from its serious industrial workaday use and so developed into an improvised play area. The stark harsh interior was made over into a cinema space wherein electric projectors threw film clips or abstract images onto plastic sheets hanging on clotheslines. More bizarrely the interior

⁴² Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 59.

⁴³ Plant, p. 59 & 61.

⁴⁴ Plant, p. 60.

took on a rather absurd ambience as radical counter-culturists attempted to build a six-foot jelly, which collapsed into a multi-glutinous blob, 'like the remains of a dead alien in a horror movie', the more extrovert partygoers excitedly slid about in.⁴⁵

The theory of the *dérive* was also palpable in the Roundhouse event's juxtaposition of heterogeneous multi-media. The multi-media approach to culture articulated a politics of the *dérive* because, by selecting multiple forms of articulation, British radicals promoted the idea that subjects and radical cultures must 'drift' between - and experience - alternative mediums and aesthetic genres, not only reconstructed alien social environments. For example, the rock band The Soft Machine played conventional rock music until a 'cranked-up' motorbike spewing exhaust fumes appeared upon the stage. With the noise of its engine amplified to screaming pitch by the PA, this incongruous action distorted the experience from a transparent music event into a situation redolent of a 60s 'happening'. At other junctures the abrasive ambience of the environment mutated into something more peaceful as the Soft Machine, in an extended chant, bolted on a spiritual dimension. Drifting culturally elsewhere, topless young women smeared with pink paint danced wildly on platforms and so brought elements of contemporary performance art, the *Oz* magazine, or a Soho revue bar, to the mix. What this event signified, then, was that, homologous to the Situationist *dérive*, as a form of art it marked a significant breakaway from the current received and staid cultural norms. The 'open ended innovation' of the Roundhouse happening gave hope that, having converted a given cultural space, the counter-culture had engineered an alternative British *situation* within which new-found alternative culture practices could be defended.⁴⁶

On many levels post-'68 political theatre *dérived* in a comparable creative way. A case in point is Keffe's own conversion to an alternative style of theatre. After watching Brenton's *Saliva Milkshake* (1969) at the Soho Poly, he realised that, by constructing a new cultural environment, the playwright had transformed theatre-going - a received situation - into a cultural episode more in common with a night at a West-end soul club (broadly speaking, a proletarian space), than a piece of theatre.

⁴⁵ Mick Farren, *Give The Anarchist A Cigarette* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 73.

⁴⁶ Farren, p. 74.

For me everything about it made it love at first sight. It was a scorching summer and the low-ceilinged sweaty cellar reminded me at once of the atmosphere of the Flamingo Club where I used to go for Georgie Fame and The Blue Flames in the sixties. I'd always wished a theatre experience could have the same buzz as a music gig and the Poly fitted that bill exactly ⁴⁷

Consequently, Keeffe, and others, endeavoured to reframe theatre as a cultural object or field of social praxis. By producing plays that lasted no more than an hour Brenton, Keeffe, and, Wilson created an aesthetic which sought to form a structural coincidence with 'the gig' or 'sporting event'. Manipulating the auditorium towards a different use, theatre sought to become more fun; a friendly, amenable, and communal area to inhabit. Of course, political playwrights did not wheel buildings around as the SI demanded, nor change theatre *into* a football ground or discotheque, but they did modify the social and stylistic ambience of this received and restrictive socio-cultural area. Moreover, if, as I have maintained, during this period radical culture came to stand for the social whole, by seeking to subvert theatre into a new area for emotional occurrence, in opposition to dominant expressions of extant theatre, playwrights played their own small, but unified, part in restructuring given environments. Keeffe's particular contestatory expression, for instance, pointed out the wider struggle to transform other public social spaces towards pleasurable ends. Put very plainly, post'68, theatre workers looked to transport the situation of theatre from its residency in a heavy, unsmiling, and sober quarter - like the pre-revolutionary urban environment, say - into perhaps a 'happy quarter', a small unified gesture towards building what the SI's Chtcheglov called the wider 'urban hacienda'.⁴⁸ Moving away from a concern with a synthesised pop-theatre, but staying within the conversion of architectural space, the very mobile and transportable nature of the work of 7:84 or Brenton and Hare's 'Portable' Theatre evidenced an affirmative cultural drift. Highland halls, community buildings, university studios and art labs were commonly turned into theatre spaces, rock venues, or political platforms. The political playwright, then, by refusing to accept the immobility of metropolitan theatre, the interconnection between a building and its use, created situations anew, cultural affairs in which

⁴⁷ See Barry Keeffe, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001), Intro p. x. On other occasions throughout the 70s Keeffe put on plays in between acts at music gigs, creating the one-act play *SuS* for the Rock Against Racism festival.

⁴⁸ Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary For A New Urbanism', in Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, pp.1-4.

mobile theatre could transform unconventional spaces and environments, at will.

As the Roundhouse event proves, however, post'68, *dérive* was not restricted to geographical drift, but also socio-cultural. Snoo Wilson's two plays of the early 70s *Blowjob* (1971) and *Pignight* (1971), along with Howard Brenton's *Hitler Dances* (1977), substantiated the period's socio-cultural *dérive* by transforming the conventional experience of theatre (*Blowjob* previewed at the Edinburgh festival whilst *Pignight* and *Hitler Dances* played at the Traverse Theatre Edinburgh), into multi-dimensional media events. Homological to the playful psychic and cultural situations Debord and Farren describe, by cutting and pasting together a kaleidoscope of eclectic styles and situations, Brenton and Wilson, as well as Keefe, Edgar, Poliakoff, and, even Griffiths, rendered theatre a more divergent, malleable experiential environment. For instance, eschewing a myopic alliance with pop/rock *Hitler Dances* was radically rootless, culturally roving. Brenton, *à la* Chetglov, disorientated the spectator in a purposeful open-ended visitation of styles as the performance jumped between films, storytelling, fables, and comic characters. When Hans, the ghost of a dead German soldier, was raised from the dead the resurrection was fantastic, surreal, and playful, redolent of the resurrection of a ghost seen in children's cartoon adventures or TV animations such as *Scooby Doo*. In other scenes the play captivated the audience with the world of Saturday-night TV as the German-soldier, reminiscent of The Russ Abbot Show or *Eagle* comic, in comic teutonic tones, said 'Hello hello - Jawohl Zieg Heil'. Cultural disorientation continued later in the play when actors took turn to dress in the German soldier's clothes, and bounding around the stage doing 'indian yodels', occupied the hitherto serious-playing area with a child's game of war, 'Enemies'. Armed with make-believe machine-guns actors shot at each other making the type of imitative machine-gun noises children invent: 'HNNNNNNNNNN!'. For, colonised by adult actors making infantile gestures, V-signs, thumbs on noses, or shouting 'goody goody', the stage-space bore a resemblance to a street-scene where children play imaginatively. Changing the environment again, *Hitler Dances* evoked the ribaldry of the Victorian music hall through a pastiche of the 1970s TV show *The Good Old Days*, when an actor dressed as a burlesque upper-class British Officer performed a 'revue', singing a light-hearted ditty or musical rendition about unarmed combat (*Hitler Dances* Scene 16).

That said, away from the fun aspect, the period's communal cultural *dérive*, had heavy political points to make. The aesthetic theatrical drift into multi-media signified the playwright's, and, more importantly, the spectator's, journey into otherwise closed *socio-cultural quarters*. As we have seen from Bourdieu's comparative field of distinction, most of the above are broadly speaking 'vulgar' or common (read proletarian) in formal classification: situation comedy, TV, cabaret, light-entertainment, situation comedy, music hall, and so on. Thus political plays imported forms from pulp or trash culture into the space of the theatre to resolutely transport the bourgeois spectator into different worlds, psychological, cultural, and social ones. In practice, audiences experienced a certain threatening 'psychogeography',⁴⁹ in so much as, abandoned amongst the threatening architecture and sounds of an alien culture and space, middle-class spectators were left to walk alone within the working-class culture which had wandered in through a restrictive door marked Theatre.⁵⁰ In *Blowjob*, for example, the play relocated the middle-class audience in the coarse environment of a northern working-mens' club. Confronted by blue-collar skinheads making homophobic gags about Greek sailors performing sex for money with their nostrils, it was as if the audience had mistook the entrance to the theatre building and *dérived* into a physically recognisable working-class club. Configured under Chtchevlovian conditions Wilson's *Blowjob* took the received situation of the urban safe theatre of the middle-class and symbolically transported the audience into a sinister proletarian quarter.

The reconstruction of theatre into a sinister quarter can be seen in *Hitler Dances* when, in contrast to the more benign clashes of light popular formal articulations, Brenton relocated the performance experience within particularly disturbing territory. In contrast to the common demonising of the allied enemy, the play described how the defeated German army had to walk home starving, shoeless, surviving on human meat:

Hans: Ja Human Meat, on the bone. Big dead American. Boiled a bit of him.

He taps his helmet

In my Vermacht tin hat.

Carole: Urr, what bit?

⁴⁹ Psychogeography is the term the Situationists use to describe the gist of the *dérive*.

Hans: Big American bicep. Very fat. Had tattoo of naked lady sitting on Empire State Building. (*Hitler Dances* Scene 1)

Similarly, as the actor/children 'played at war', although absurdly comic, the company portrayed the reality of nuclear conflict, in its atrocious reality.

My brother says a nu'clear bomb explosion is so *bright* you all go blind...blind like that...an my brother says all the *metals* get *melted*, even your watch an' your glasses. An' your hair falls out an' babies get born *freaks*...*fantastic*. (*Hitler Dances* Scene 3)

In other sections actors calmly sat in a circle and, in the atmospheric quiet of the theatre, graphically described women having their faces torn off in air raids, dying of fear, soldiers driven to starvation eat their own hand, tanks breaking spines and castration by bullets.

Aside from the Greek-sailor example, parallel to *Hitler Dances*, *Pignight* and *Blowjob* effortlessly switched between creating an emotional quarter assembled out of the banal comic pop of light entertainment, into horrific, often abject, though normally fascinating, social taboos. With the performance area thrown into darkness, only feet could be heard eerily treading upon gravel. Bright sudden flashes of light revealed grotesque figures, half-men half-porcine, performing acts of buggery with young farmhands and pigs. In presenting personages weirdly dressed in riding coats, flat caps, and pink eye-patches *Pignight* figuratively converted the benign 'show' into a non-sensical nightmarish surrealist painting or dreamscape. Holding a stuffed dog with each paw the pigs tap-danced in a line, whilst a large multi-stripped umbrella was inexplicably opened and placed upon a hat-rack. When an actor offered a member of the audience the stuffed dog to stroke, the same cast-member aggressively kicked it out his/her hands, another actor then stabbed the dog with a pitch fork, its disturbing barks and squeals made by the human-pigs. The play ended in virtual darkness until the Smitty actor appeared and, after cutting the kidneys from two human corpses, the actor/schizophrenic proceeded to heat up a real pan of butter and fried animal kidneys, filling the theatre with the suggested aroma of cooked human meat (*Pignight* Act 1). *Blowjob* terminated with equivalent horror as the schizophrenic Moira applied make up to a dying man. Rather than perform oral sex upon the mutilated body of the homosexual

security guard, though, the Moira actress takes out a razor, cuts his throat, and places a cigarette in his mouth. To compound the shock of the Moira scene, choking acrid smoke from an exploding safe filled the space and ended the performance. In fact, *Blowjob* looked to startle the audience throughout with burglar alarms, screaming actors, and flashing disco lights. Actors also heated-up glass bottles which, though exploding upon the stage, still threatened danger as scattering glass flew dangerously close to spectators.

In their radical practice of the *dérive*, then, exemplary performances such as *Blowjob*, *Pignight*, and *Hitler Dances* underlined how the everyday environment, identical to the social gestures of the theatre space, is organised and structured against human emotions and social interaction. Refusing resignation to extant one-dimensional landscapes, homologous to Chetglov's call to build multi-faceted built environments, radical theatre *dérive* strove to create emotional *experimental* areas and construct a theatre with new *emotional quarters*; a fresh innovative theatre which could be happy and sinister, sexual and cerebral, or morbid and aggressive. In embracing multimedia, political theatre staged environmental experiences that no longer existed as a separate psychic environments or landscapes but morphed with the patterns of everyday popular culture, the soccer game, factory environment, or the TV programmes watched in every working class home. Finally, if the *dérive's* function was to construct environments which match everyday emotional needs or moods, when theatre-*dérive* produced a mixed ambience or experiential socio-cultural vibe it was simply reacting to the demands of contemporary everyday desires, not simply intellectual pretensions. As such bourgeois theatre, as an elevated art form, found itself disorientated; brought down to the everyday demands of the critical mass.

In social terms, of course, the connection between the *dérive* aesthetic of political theatre and the demands of a socio-political *dérive* was that, by turning the theatre into a combustible laboratory for sensory environments, playwrights made the very political demands of the *dérive* present - the idea that one must transform the wider given environments into situations one would desire. Destroying extant theatre, then, was comparable to reshaping society - aesthetic experiments were homologous to social ones. Brenton's innovations in the theatre may at first seem bizarre, even quirky clashes of styles. But, as he explains, these clashes of comedy, knockabout humour and seriously tragic

scenes were 'attempts to get the theatre to become more real'.⁵¹ By destroying conventional theatre's 'unity of style' Brenton sought to reconcile art and everyday life, high and low art, into a new experimental diverse form. 'You are always trying to rework the alchemists formula, "*solve et coagula*"-"dissolve and re-set"' he says. Brenton's dramatic alchemical analogy is particularly telling in that it reflects the wider change political theatre and the radicals of May'68 sought to manufacture out of the 'congealed' social situation with their fluid experimentation.⁵² From a homological perspective, the presence of the *dérive* in the first instance indicated post-'68 political theatre's advocacy of the necessary drift between forms for its own sake. In the second model the presence of the *dérive* sought to reveal the wider possibilities for the construction of other socio-political situations, the manipulation of environments, and the struggle for the broader creation of human atmospheres. No longer was theatre political because it held a discourse *about* politics, but political because it strove to create new moods and ambiances from within given everyday situations, 'a passional journey out of the ordinary through rapid changes of ambiances'.⁵³ Put in sensory terms, the Situationist political playwright, acknowledged the 'solipsistic nature' of the dominant mode of theatre⁵⁴and, by contrast, attacked the wider idioms of that society by short circuiting bourgeois intellectualism with an appeal to the physical, emotional, psychological, culturally deviant, though democratic, radical subject.

Intermedialism: A New-Found Culture?

Any discussion of *dérive*, suggests, in semantic terms, a sort of lacklustre chance encounter, a chaotic and unplanned stroll with other cultural groupings; a schizophrenic-nomadology, to be sure. All of these definitions may be true. But there are alternative pathways towards a stronger critical understanding of the unified philosophy of *dérive*. Stewart Home, for instance, argues that to grasp the full force of this engineering of multi-medium happenings, SI theory must be repositioned within the wider context of a counter-cultural tradition he identifies as *utopian*.⁵⁵ What is utopian about utopians - he cites the philosophical writings of de Sade, Lautremont, Morris, Jarry, Bakunin, Nietzsche, Sorel, Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Lettrisme,

⁵¹ Howard Brenton, *Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1986), see preface.

⁵² Brenton, *Plays: One*, preface.

⁵³ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 24.

⁵⁴ McGrath, p. 62.

⁵⁵ Home, p. 4.

Fluxus, Mail art, punk rock, and Neoism - is that, as radicals, they all set out to purposefully fall between cultural disciplines, and advocated the crossing over of genres.⁵⁶

The utopianists' multidisciplinary approach to aesthetic production Home calls *Intermedial*.⁵⁷ Although Home's intellectual connections are too wide-ranging for here, his idea of the intermedial is politically useful in many other ways. Because if we convert the political currency of the cultural into the social - artists making pieces which appose and introduce hitherto *incompatible* hierarchical or classified elements - this declassification returns us to Marx and Engels' earlier utopian proposition that an economically classless society must be classless in every sphere of existence. What is truly utopian about intermediality is that, as a tradition, its adherents insistently maintain that it is only in striving to construct an integrated world - a 'real' world where cultural separations no longer exist - that one can start to build its social and political counterpart. Put another way, in the pursuit of social amalgamation and community, radicals must make the revolutionary gesture of integrating every aspect of cultural practice by building a social cooperative out of an aesthetic collective.

The Lettriste International Movement (1946-57), for instance, spoke of synthesising poetry and music into a "single art" which bore no trace of any "original difference".⁵⁸ CoBrA (1948-1951), together with the Dutch group Reflex, fused popular culture with psychotherapy, architecture, painting, writing, theatre, occultism, cinema, and education within one unified - *classless* - cultural entity. The overarching aim of these two groups was to deconstruct the separations we see formed between stratified social and aesthetic groupings in modern industrial societies. They held that, mixed together in the collective of the performance event, existent hierarchical classes, be they class or cultural differences, would be *erased*. Fluxus in America, for example, produced classless happenings or spectacles which (they suggested) returned art to the

⁵⁶ 'In the twentieth-century, those *adhering* to Utopian Principles have worked between "art", "politics", "architecture", "urbanism" and all other specialisms that arise from separation. Utopians aim to "create" a "new" world where these specialisations will no longer exist'. Home p. 6.

⁵⁷ Home, p. 52. Alan Sinfield offers evidence of a wider late 60s intermedialism in this short description: 'Through Pop Art, happenings, Artaud and Fringe theatre, underground poetry, and the new respect shown to television and popular music, traditional notions of cultural authority fell into confusion. "Art", "literature" and "poetry" looked like graffiti, advertisements, comics and pop songs, and the kind of attention usually given to "good" culture was lavished on commercial forms'. Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), p. 284.

⁵⁸ Home, p. 13.

tradition of the 'natural event' of 'real' everyday life.⁵⁹ Practitioners of the intermedial anticipated that the differentiation between art, society, philosophy, and politics would therefore become increasingly hard to classify. The adoption of multi-media amounted to a radical gesture set up to deconstruct social distinctions. In contrast to the chance drift of the *dérive*, we can formulate a discourse which figures the intermedial as a figurative *purposeful eclecticism*.⁶⁰

In maintaining or reinterpreting the tenets of intermediality, we can see that when the 7:84 theatre company staged *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, their combination of ordinary everyday formal articulations - the piece mixed jokes, communal singing, dancing, oral story telling, pantomime, history, serious political comment, and naturalistic theatre - did not happen by chance, but articulated a structural political gesture. By inserting everyday low-culture within elitist drama each genre in a way disappeared within the collective of the formal community, as the company elevated the everyday to entertainment and reduced theatre to the everyday. For example, reflecting the formal articulations of a northern working-men's club, 7:84 had an M.C. to welcome the audience to the event. Rather than talk in a notional abstract register, he talked about the weather, and invited the audience to join in the singing and dancing. If they were not familiar with the words of the ballads chosen, theatre workers had the lines crudely painted upon a white cloth which helped communal participation and undermined any cultural or perceived artistic exclusivity residual in the general separation between performer, audience, art, and life. The workers of 7:84 displayed a thoroughgoing intermediality, too. As singers, drivers, musicians, painters, set designers, storytellers, or stagehands they refused to be classified or limit their role to a single discipline. They also frequently entered the space of the audience, and, as the evening ended, the 'actors' mixed openly with the community as the 'play' transformed into a 'dance', as such the event sought to blur all cultural and social distinctions.

What is more, the communal construction of *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil* raised some serious broader political points. For by

⁵⁹ Home, p 50-59. The new/old culture of the post-war avant-garde, of course, harked back to the Dadaist inspired days of the Cabaret Voltaire. Against serious high-culture, Dada performances included jokes, poetry, performance, film, theatre, cardboard cut-outs, live poetry, dancing and painting; the performance event owed more to working class variety or club culture than orthodox culturally separated bourgeois arts. See, Hans Richter, *Dada: art and anti-art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p.12-32.

⁶⁰ These Situationist ideas were imported into England by the Scottish underground writer and activist Alex Trocchi (a radical thinker who influenced much of the counter-cultural rock milieu already outlined), ideas widely aired at a 1960 ICA conference in London. Home, p.37.

presenting the audience with the performative aesthetic of the intermedial it declassified itself as theatre, in that it was also a rock musical, folk evening, political meeting, historical lecture, and a night of comedy. By integrating high and low culture; politics and art; theatre and music; theatre and politics; audience and artists the playwright ideally formatted a 'seamless' entity. Indeed, once made intermedial, multi-media plays rendered theatre - the original form - no longer instantly recognisable as a singular formal articulation. Homological to the 'struggles within genres' of the post-'68 counter-cultural events, they presented a new *classless* cultural object, a fusion of all classes of aesthetics, an attempt to build a new constructed egalitarian and level cultural situation. By the same token, 7:84's socio-cultural gesture reinforced McGrath's Marxist vision of a wider egalitarian socialised community, a vision he shared with the SI and other utopians, ultimately the revolutionary search for the universally classless society.

We can develop this utopian idea of linking aesthetic and social communality a stage further by connecting intermedial theatre to other avant-garde assemblages.⁶¹ The work of Robert Rauschenberg or Ray Johnson, for example, used found and ready made materials such as discarded pop posters of Elvis Presley, stuffed birds from junk shops, old fruit boxes, and fragments of newspaper texts to build new works of art. The political significance of these mixed collages was that, unlike the revered art of Raphael, they were seeking to be anonymous; unlike bourgeois art, they sought to have no singular 'heroic author' or artist creator. Each element of the piece belonged to everyone, the social whole, for in this artistic communism they were borrowed from every sphere of the everyday culture of the masses.⁶²

For Situationist artists this creative anonymity was vital. Chapter 2 outlines how the SI presented itself as an organisation without leaders, media stars, or spokespeople. Communiqués argued that the bourgeois conception of art and artistic genius had become outdated and that in this new situation 'Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it'.⁶³ Exhibiting Farren's 'thinking in common' or Williams' 'structure of feeling', post-'68 Situationist-style theatre embraced the assemblage for it also, in the search for social community,

⁶¹ Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance, Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 2003). This is perhaps an example of what Kershaw calls *synecdoche*, whereby one form of protest, in this case the art-'part', stands in for a protest against the social whole. See, p. 92.

⁶² Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent 1955-69* (London: Everyman, 1996), pp. 14-17.

⁶³ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 10.

wanted to annul the spectre of the authorial function. *Hitler Dances*, for one, borrowed heavily from 'ready made' or 'found' film culture. For instance, in Scene 19, when actors enacted the parachuting of the British secret agent Violette Szabo into Germany - they were asked to '*spin out...into parachute effect... lit by a beam from the floor level, passing through their upraised arms again and again, like a lighthouse beam* - 'the drop' and Szabo's subsequent capture were both achieved by evoking news reels or popular war films. Rather than exhibit any individual genius, *Hitler Dances*, like the assemblage, stole or found common usable artefacts from the already-in-place culture of the public domain. The contemporaneous quest for artistic collectives explains why Brenton made 'the-artist-as-playwright' disappear in the '*The Adventure in the Field*' scene. Rather than exhibit any originality on the part of the author's 'expressive' idiosyncratic imagination, actors described an archetypal wartime 'ambush' - a scene that clearly plagiarised cinematic images of other war-time-escapee films, particularly *Carve Her Name With Pride* (1958) (Rank film's cinematic portrayal of the 'true story' of Violette Szabo).

Tony: True story! Gun battle and capture!

Carole: Driving along a country lane!

Tony: Sunlight glints on a German helmet, a hundred yards ahead!

Carole: Stop the car ! Get out! Keep your heads down! Into the hedge!

Tony: Ambush, raus raus.

Carole: Run across the field!

Tony: Here they come Hundreds of 'em [...] Gun Battle

Carole: Vi you lie in the grass, in the field, turn with your gun and kill and kill and kill. (*Hitler Dances* Scene 22)

Yet in proposing an intermedial theatre, this again amounted to the playwright's articulation of a broader political world-view, rather than a rigorous idiomatic aesthetic gesture. Intermedial theatre can be theorised as political because, if high-culture is individualistic and hierarchical, often figuring out art as the personal expression of individuality and genius, intermedial culture is antagonistically plagiaristic and communal, allowing both cultural and social participation. Once more, cultural solidarity can stand in for social and political unity. Conversely, in post-'68 performances, the art of the masses became not only a found culture - Keeffe's pop songs as epigraphs being another due

example - but a positively 'chosen community' by radical theatre writers.⁶⁴ Also, in positively adopting proletarian culture, over and above an inherited patriarchal bourgeois aesthetic, post-'68 dramatists exhibited a wilful aesthetic orphanage. In refusing their own socio-cultural past, political artists advertised their determined subjective 'commonness'; a commonness which signalled the political rejection of bourgeois society *per se*, for, as I have outlined, to be downwardly mobile in the late 60s and early 70s was *de rigueur*.⁶⁵ Vice versa, by reducing everything, including one's own existential subjectivity, to the degree zero of aesthetic and social equivalence, political theatre revealed real life, the common vulgar life of the working class, to be valid, vital, and important. Finally, if theatre can be reduced to a comparatively indecipherable classless non-competitive media, a conglomeration of other everyday formal articulations, is it a rock concert, cinema, TV or a dance, a question arises about the theatre's status as art, and bourgeois art in general. The SI noted that, 'In the past every dominant class had its *own* art - for the same reasons that a classless society will have none'.⁶⁶ The adoption of intermediality seems to suggest that post-'68 political theatre had also realised this fact. Intermedial theatre announced its own end-to-art gesture, only in this case it was, again, *Fin* the Theatre.

Cultural Modifications

To simply think about the intermedial theatre, and, by homology, society in these structurally classless - even artless - terms, however, can add up to, at best, the cultural relativism of the post-modern, at worst, a psychological shift towards crude workerism.⁶⁷ In reality, despite the egalitarian gestures of assemblage, in the main, intermedial declassification seems to amount to the promotion of working-class culture at the expense of the more productive elements of bourgeois intellectualism. Despite utopian classlessness, we get a confused separatism rather than the parity of outcome intermedialism suggests. A radically different interpretation of this scenario is that, although the playwright or theatre worker may have been arguing contemporary proletarian

⁶⁴ Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Green, ed, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 375.

⁶⁶ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 143.

⁶⁷ At the Ecole Beaux- Arts posters were only considered valid if done by a worker. See Keith Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p.94.

culture had value, a *reverse intermedialism* also came into play within this experimental socio-cultural dynamic. Cultural combination can also indicate that bourgeois culture, despite its derogation, has a residual value of its own. Within this divergent model, middle-class intellectual theatre does not have to be smashed-up, just *re-unified* within other forms of everyday expression. The intermedial can thus be thought of as a 'transitional work',⁶⁸ an aesthetic that foretells of the emergence of a transitional society.

As we noted in utopianism, radicals combined a diversity of philosophical and political thematics, as well as genres. Likewise, in *Hitler Dances*, although actors narrated the 'capture scene' in the tones and rhythm of a square dance caller, the general force of the piece was towards an overarching engagement with contemporary serious debate, in this case the media distortion of the spectacle of war. Likewise, *Pignight* and *Blowjob* amalgamated thought-provoking political questions within their anti-elitist aesthetic.⁶⁹ Endorsing the major tenets of Anti-psychiatry, for example, *Pignight* showed Smitty made schizoid by bad parenting, the forced inculcation of an overbearing oedipalising 'European tradition', the play also referenced Laing's *The Divided Self* (*Blowjob* Act 2). At other junctures the drama integrated French existential philosophy by citing the Sartrean-styled observation that 'hell is ourselves' (*Blowjob* Act 1). Wilson's plays referenced Mao or Marxist theory, 'all property is meaningless', debated the Black Power movement and race riots in the USA, and alluded to the anti-colonialist theories of Franz Fanon (*Blowjob* Act 2). *Pignight* name-checked Khrushchev, Kennedy, and Macmillan. It also synthesised the writings of Darwinian theory, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Nietzsche's idea of the uberman (in this case the comical uber-pig) in a singular idea: humans may regress to apes, pigs will take over the world. In a critique of the ecological depletion of the countryside by modern farming and a candid description of the ruthless human exploitation of animals, *Pignight* related Wilson's radical green politics to the audience:

⁶⁸ Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana Press, 1981), see Chapter 7: 'Reproductions' - particularly subsection *Transitions*, p. 199.

⁶⁹ *Blowjob* frequently resembled popular TV or 'light entertainment', rather than serious theatre. For instance, sketches with caricatures of skinheads, men dressed as women, security guards being blown up and left black and charred, pigs talking to comic Germans in a psychiatric ward call to mind the sketches one associates with 'popular' Saturday night TV shows *Morecambe and Wise*, *The Dick Emery Show*, or Russ Abbot's *Mad Hour*. Similarly, when a man is beaten until his brains break through his skull or scenes of cannibalism, sodomy, and bestiality pervade the performance, such images evoke late-night horror films or the 'Driller Killer' genre of cinema. Popular culture, was referenced further through the inclusion of ventriloquist acts, (a talking dog sits on an actor's knee) and a drag-queen.

Barbed wire fences, a sea of chopped mud tarmacked in strips, with scum on them, a few small orchards dripping pesticides and the fen creeks rancid with ammonium nitrate. (*Pignight* Act 1)

There's a limit to the amount of pork you can take. But there's always the leather industry, which leads into clothes and shoes, luxury goods, battery poulterers buy the bone for chicken meal, gelatine gives you a lead into the sweet industry. (*Pignight* Act 1)

Combining intellectual political and literary culture with an eclectic blend of popular culture, *Hitler Dances*, *Pignight*, and *Blowjob* therefore provide symptomatic evidence of a very different aesthetic to one which would boil down radical theatre to the base anti-intellectualism of popularised workers' culture. Indeed, within this transitional paradigm bourgeois theatre lent credence and prestige to the workers *per se* in that the ultimate aim of a theatre like Wilson's was to *revalue* the radical potential of working class life via its *associative alliance* with the intellectual milieu. Unlike McGrath and Cohn Bendit's utilitarian position, which skirts patronisation, *Pignight* and *Blowjob's* fusion of avant-garde intellectual political theory with that of working class forms simply exhibited Wilson's thinking in common with the Situationist assertion that the working class, and its culture, were capable of splicing radical political theory onto and within the time and space of their extant everyday lives.⁷⁰ Through this alternative synthesis the wider cognoscenti were positively redistributing cultural prestige to a devalued people and its culture through the *reframing* of that culture within the valued field of drama. More crucially, political playwrights were reclaiming theatre as a medium fit to deal with serious political issues through its paradoxical borrowing from working class life and its forms, in that radical theatre advertised its own radical liberal 'open-mindedness' by seeing the best aspects of proletarian culture, without denying its own intellectual heritage. By cross-fertilising hybrid opposed genres - serious philosophy and politics with popular low culture - experimental intermedialists synthesised political theatre into a more alchemic *mixed identity*, rather than making performances which pursued blind solidarity or adopted separatist downsizing. By homology, if working-class culture could be cross-pollinated

⁷⁰ Unlike Cohn-Bendit the SI vehemently defended the capability of the workers to understand radical theory arguing that their journal *Internationale Situationniste* was commonly carried into the workplace in the worker's knapsack. See Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p 213 & 241.

with larger middle-class issues, in a Hegelian sense we can see that the political theatre recognised that social groups *per se*, can be dialectically *synthesised* into new *unified*, more powerful, holistic public conglomerates.

To explain political theatre's socio-cultural synthesis through a Situationist aesthetic - without claiming that political playwrights were directly referencing it, or even conversant with it - we can turn to Asger Jorn's avant-garde painting *Paris By Night* (1959). (see fig 13). Rather than create a new painting, Jorn would salvage a piece of obsolete art, in this case a romantic lone figure gazing into the Paris night, from junk shops.⁷¹ Taking these discarded portraits, Jorn added expressionistic patterns in the style of Jackson Pollock - an act of experimental cultural intervention he called a *modification*. The political import of the modification was that it allowed an artist to simultaneously breath 'new life' or *value* into two different *devalued* cultures, in one straightforward gesture. The received dead-art of bourgeois naturalistic painting received renewed input from the avant-garde, whilst the avant-garde retained its status within the field of culture, a status suggested by the new art's stubborn situation within the existent framing of the canvas or wooden picture frame. Through this new cultural arrangement Jorn gestured to destroy or devalue a *passé* art form - classic portrait painting, say - whilst, through reclamation or salvage, re-valued art's essential potential as a carrier of meaning. Jorn's experimentation, then, like Wilson's dramatic art, was not about re-making a new art or 'ism', ignorantly destroying the old 'isms', but 'playing around' with orthodox cultural heritage, amalgamating diverse forms of cultural production into revolutionary new conglomerations. That is to say, resembling the SI, the avant-garde pieces of Wilson and Brenton aimed to 'reinvent' and 'bankrupt' culture on an 'entirely new basis', though, at the same time, acting in and with that culture.⁷²

It is this devaluation and re-valuation of one form of cultural expression at the expense of the other - the alchemical change brought about by experimental modification - that interested these political playwrights. As the politicised comic strip demonstrates, it is not that the proletarian form overthrows the bourgeois articulation or means of communication. It is during their *collision* that a bourgeois form such as intellectual political theory is re-evaluated, re worked, and remade within and through this clash of cultural elements. The political ideas of the avant-garde or academic institution receive

⁷¹ Crow, pp. 50-51.

⁷² Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, pp. 111-113.

new potency and colour through their formal articulation in a proletarian form. What this signifies in socio-political terms is that society itself can best be improved, not through separatism or relativism, but a more radical dialectical synthesis of the social whole. Unlike reformist embourgeoisment - the workers become middle-class - in social modification, a modification of society, the move is more towards a gesture of blending intellectual and working class life. Set in these terms social unification becomes mutually beneficial, symbiotic. In the last instance, the pathway to an understanding of political theatre's aesthetic modifications lies in an acknowledgment of its unified revolutionary demand for social transition. Because culture had come to stand in for the social whole 'the integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu'⁷³ *Pignight*, *Blowjob*, and *Hitler Dances* painted the way to a superior society, a political culture constructed and salvaged out of the best of the past and the best of the present into a cultural collective.

Political Theatre 'For Culture': 'You Can't Really Like This Shit Can You?'

To pursue the idea that a clear *reclamation* of bourgeois theatre by the avant-garde reflected a coherent Situationist logic might seem to point out a certain theoretical misunderstanding, not only on the part of the thesis, but on the part of the wider counter-cultural radicals. As we have seen, in a period marked-out by its determined global anti-imperialism, a radical gesture like intermedialism generally flagged up the cultural dissident's fight *against* any form of bourgeois *cultural imperialism* - the cultural part coming to stand for the social whole. Thus to argue that an anti-cultural political theatre, one influenced by SI theory, sought some form of cultural integration or alliance with the dominant bourgeois culture seems unfounded. Yet, there is a coherent logic in this synthesis. For the SI, in certain moments, paradoxically declared itself against radicals they labelled *anti-cultural*. Indeed Debord stated that, in contrast to a positive philistinism, in many ways the SI were *for* culture, albeit a critical one.⁷⁴

To understand this mixed message we need to transfer the idea of cultural imperialism from the cultural sphere back to the political field. The SI, for instance, although thoroughgoing in their promotion of the proletariat class,

⁷³ Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 45-46.

⁷⁴ See 'The Avant-Garde of Presence', Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 110.

critiqued Western youth culture and rock 'n' roll as simply another arm of the apolitical consumer society. By association, the SI connected popular mass culture with the rampant capitalism and rampant imperialism of the USA. During this period, such a coincidence had a considerable political resonance. As the cultural critic Alan Sinfield has pointed out, although many counter-cultural anti-cultural radicals embraced Americanisation as a kind of resistance to a hegemonic European culture, for the politicised avant-garde much of their antipathy towards the United States *per se* became transposed into hostility towards the cultural imperialism of the *americanised* commercialised pop culture of the masses.⁷⁵ And, because rock 'n' roll music and the US were virtual synonyms, Debord, devout in his own anti-American attitudes,⁷⁶ could conversely connect the global threat of American military imperialism with that of its hegemonic youth culture. Henceforth sections of the European avant-garde set about the US by asserting itself against its culture.

Whilst *Teeth 'n' Smiles* is far from a Situationist paradigm, thinking in common with the wider left, the play's overt utterances do bring much of the above to mind. For instance, analysis of the play seems to suggest that, in contrast to the politicised anti-cultural cognoscenti, Hare repositioned himself against American rock culture. Mostly uninterested in the political utility of avant-garde rock, *Teeth 'n' Smiles* implied that many activists went to see Hendrix because of his 'big cock'. Counter to the sanctification of the Rolling Stones' *Street Fighting Man*, this performance only referenced it to undermine its value, claiming it was 'over earnest'. *Pace* Debord, the drama ran a discourse on the 'screaming stupidity of popular music' (*Teeth 'n' Smiles* Scene 1). As if to illustrate the folly of rock, Hare paradoxically inserted a live rock group, replete with banal lyrical content, within the performance event. The *Yeah Yeah Yeah* song, for example, merely repeated "Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah – yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah" and so parodied the banality of contemporary pop music and epitomized the genre's apolitical apathy (*Teeth 'n' Smiles* Scene 3). Contra other performances, *Teeth 'n' Smiles* refused to revalue rock music as an artefact possessing value. The live rock band was not a weapon to desecrate a consecrated theatre, but a cultural tool to turn theatre *against* this genre of art. In fact, *Teeth 'n' Smiles* proffered that the music scene

⁷⁵ Sinfield, p.154 & 156. Raymond Williams, for one, remarked that, 'much of this bad work [rock 'n' roll] is American in origin'. See Sinfield, p. 241.

⁷⁶ Crow, p. 56.

had been *recuperated* into a reactionary form of industrial western capitalism; not a liberating radical counter-cultural form, as its supporters believed it to be.

Comparable to the industrial division of labour, Hare demonstrated that the music business is constructed from a structural hierarchy made up of owners of the means of production, record company executives, agents, managers, singers, musicians, writers, drivers, and various labourers. As the audience entered the auditorium, paying spectators - maybe rock fans - were confronted with low paid manual labour, roadies, working hard 'behind the scenes' to set up the means of production, the amplifiers, lighting, and instruments. At other intersections the play alluded to rock music as a type of merchandise when a 'musician' states, 'we could be anything. Soapflakes we could be'. The performance suggested that the rise of asexual glam-rock stars such as David Bowie and Marc Bolan owed their fame to the inventiveness of 'money men', pop-products created by the 'bosses' to sell to the 'queer market', not authentic articulations of a natural people's culture (*Teeth 'n' Smiles* Scene 3/2).

Much of Hare's critique was underpinned by the 'good culturists' fear that authentic political-folk culture, epitomised by acts like Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan, had been bastardised and adulterated by Americanised rock 'n' roll.⁷⁷ Throughout the fifties and sixties the orthodox left, most notably the Communist Party of Great Britain, promoted 'good culture' against the 'imperialist inroads of a debased US commercial culture', defending 'Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Fielding' as examples of a superior British aesthetic.⁷⁸ Likewise, Hare reminded the audience that, historically, rock had evolved from the 'authentic' organic music of Black Americans; Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker are cases in point. Spectators were also reminded that, before its transposition into commercial pop, English rock started out life as folk music, acoustic not electric, written by autonomous singer/songwriters. Once again culture was here being reconfigured as a homological field of conflict in which the struggle between genres came to stand for the struggles in society, good culture was symbiotic with the good society, bad culture remained paradigmatic for a society gone bad. *Teeth 'n' Smiles'* allusion to pre-electric folk societies is particular noteworthy because it articulated the Marxist or Anarchist mythologizing of an

⁷⁷ Culturally, this image is of critical interest because it refers to one of the key cultural turning points of the sixties counter-culture. In Manchester the folk hero Bob Dylan for the first time eschewed acoustic guitar for the electric version. Infamously a member of the audience shouted "Judas". Likewise, Hare was accusing popular music of cultural betrayal.

⁷⁸ Sinfield, p. 243.

uncorrupted pre-industrial artisan society, whilst the autonomy of the singer-song writer reflected the politics of syndicalism in the demand that human subjects remain self-directed producers, controlling and owning the means of cultural production. One of the central images of the performance, for example, was one in which technicians struggle to fix an 'electric' plug. When eventually fixed, and the band launched into two loud and heavy rock songs, the noisy disquieting gesture sought to draw the spectator's attention to the equivalent electrified chaos of modern industrial societies.

City Sugar paraded a concomitant good culturism. In contrast to Keefe's promotion of transistorised pop, Poliakoff's drama suggested that much of its productive output was a fake. Over the air the DJ Leonard Brazil claims to be holding the questions for 'the competition of the century', picked from a 'glistening silver tray', but, instead, Poliakoff had him lazily reach for blank white postcards from the mixing desk (*City Sugar Act 1/2*). Contemporary pop records played in the studio/theatre are described 'on air' as 'circles of happiness', but behind the façade derided as 'pap' (*City Sugar Act 1/1*). In reality, the reference to 'pap' initialised an attack on the cultural downsizing of radical anti-culturists, an assault finalised when Poliakoff's DJ confronted the audience with the rhetorical 'you cant really like this shit, can you?'. On the same wave length as Hare's analysis of recuperation, *City Sugar* reconfigured pop as apolitical 'manufactured synthetic violence' (*City Sugar Act 2/2*). The fictional 'Yellow Jacks' and their meaninglessly titled single 'Yellow Blues' indicated capitalism's recuperation of pop/rock further in that the group 'produced' by Poliakoff made critical parallels with contemporary manufactured groups such as *The Rubettes* or *Bay City Rollers*. In banal lyrics such as "sugar baby love" and "bye bye baby baby bye bye" these groups encapsulated the popular apathy Poliakoff and Hare derided.

It was not only to deconstruct the self-importance of rock and pop in a generic sense that Poliakoff and Hare parodied pop culture. In attacking popular music they, yet again, anticipated the need to reconnect the cultural situation with the socio-political. Using culture as their barometer they planned their respective dramas to make telling parallels between the collapse of May '68 and the depoliticised music scene. For example, *City Sugar* put forward the proposition that, post-'68, contemporary rock/pop collaborated openly with bourgeois society, promoting the capitalist society it once opposed. Originally a powerful technology, one which informed the revolutionary *événements*, post'68 the play opined that commodified pop songs had been recuperated to sell other

commodities; everything from restaurants, films, and drinks to hair shampoo. Hence *City Sugar* featured leftfield pop writers reduced to penning banal pop jingles, "Liptons makes the going easy, Liptons makes the going great" (*City Sugar Act 1/2*). Seeking to encapsulate the whole counter-revolutionary logic within one transparent image, a former 'May'68 radical' moves to 'capital' radio, a fictional move that signified the concrete political and aesthetic collapse of the radical medium of pop and radio, and its diversion towards commercial goals.

As a mode of analysis, the good culturism of Hare and Poliakoff stretched beyond a one-dimensional interrogation of rock's cultural integration and the synchronic collapse of radical revolution, by extending its field of focus to a critique of revolutionary cultural workers *per se*; those radicals who had 'sold out' to capitalist recuperation. Jonathan Green's book *Days In The Life*, for example, describes how anti-capitalist counter-cultural liberal individualism quickly metamorphosed into a thoroughgoing capitalist outlook.⁷⁹ Foreshadowing Green's book, Poliakoff's critical analysis stretched quite clearly to the post-revolutionary members of the post-'68 audience. More pressingly, through careful selection of form - *City Sugar's* pervasive use of popular music - the playwright implicitly parodied the pop-work of Keefe, and, by extension, accused other anti-cultural political theatre of commercial and *apolitical* collaboration. Enlisting popular rock and pop tunes to make theatre more accessible/attractive, as McGrath advocated,⁸⁰ was indistinguishable from being bought - or consumed - like a packet of Lipton's Tea, political theatre reduced to a consumable cultural product, indistinguishable from other pop artefacts. Poliakoff, then, did not incorporate the fashionable integration of everyday pop music or pop culture within the time/space of theatre for constructive or affirmative motives, but to, paradoxically, *separate* the two mediums. The good culturist's project was to lead the audience to a realisation that the two are politically, aesthetically, intellectually, and qualitatively different.

Their defence of good culture does not imply Hare and Poliakoff plotted against what I have called the utilitarianism of rock. *Teeth 'n' Smiles* communicated continued support for the radical generation of May'68 by including the figure of Arthur. A 'veteran of the sixties' - like Gleason - he adheres to a belief in the political power of rock to help create a utopian society. In *City Sugar* the DJ 'Leonard Brazil' functioned as a comparable gauge of the

⁷⁹ Charles Shaar Murray, for example, notes that 'The line from hippie to yuppie is not nearly as convoluted as people like to believe and a lot of the old hippie rhetoric [was soon] co-opted by the pseudo-libertarian right.' Green, p. 341.

⁸⁰ See footnote # 9 - McGrath and utilitarian art.

force pop and rock played in political and social change. On 'Leicester Sound' he still plays tunes which, like those in *Gimme Shelter*, expressed and encapsulated the hopes of the May'68 counter-cultural generation. In re-playing records taken from the 1967 'summer of love', the DJ reminded the audience that 'London' had then been 'alive' (*City Sugar Act 1/5*). *City Sugar* portrayed pop festivals like Woodstock (1969) and the Isle of Wight (1970) (see figure 12) as positive festivals of peace, love, and music.⁸¹ When the DJ played Amen Corner's *If Paradise was Half as Nice* (1967), and *Street Fighting Man* by The Rolling Stones - the former alluding to the utopianism of the milieu, the latter the revolutionary violence - the performance endeavoured to jolt the 1975 audience's cultural memory that music could be instrumental in bringing about structural and social change.

What Hare and Poliakoff were against, therefore, was not the radical potential of politicised rock, but the collapse of the spirit and generation of May '68 into cultural and political anomie - and, it would appear, they sensed the audience should be confronted with this new situation. By contrasting May'68 culture with the culture of 1975 Poliakoff challenged the audience to face the depressing fact that pop festivals and pop products had become 'vile' 'grey' 'lifeless', and 'physically dead' (*CitySugarAct1/5*). Unlike the 'high sixties' when, according to Arthur Marwick, the best - though not all - of radicalised pop and rock music advocated 'drug-taking, rejection of authority, opposition to the war in Vietnam',⁸² ten years on album sleeves listed pop stars 'likes' and 'dislikes'. 'Ross numbers among his favourite things, walnut ice cream, honeysuckle, genuine people, starfish and sunburnt bare feet' (*City Sugar Act 1/1*).

However, if pop culture had been humiliated in *City Sugar* its fall from the scene left a space for the very validation of the medium that critiqued it, *political theatre*. It was through his own chosen art, political theatre, that Poliakoff could critique a culture he believed had been politically and economically recuperated by capitalism. The spectator or consumer of his theatre therefore partook of - consumed - an aesthetic which had maintained a political and social dimension, unlike the pop culture it evaluated in the negative. *Teeth 'n' Smiles* equally denied the very notion or desirability of cultural intermediality - the experimental alchemy the avant-garde appeared to embrace. Hare did not formulate a rock concert cum-theatre-event-cum-happening, he brought together a dissonant cultural clash of formal expressions

⁸¹ Doris O'Neil, (ed), *Life, The 60s* (Boston; Bullfinch, 1989), p. 105, 106 - 107.

⁸² Marwick, p. 319 & 340.

which forced the audience to experience his parody of pop-drama with a certain discomfort or embarrassment. Hare facetiously mixed together incompatible materials, cultural elements he visualized as aesthetic oil and water. For what remained in *Teeth 'n' Smiles* after the critical separation of cultural miscegenation was, again, political theatre itself. If during the rock scenes the audience critically engaged with the author's aesthetic position, the intellectual alliance had import because through this strategy of criticism the playwright flagged up that being a political-theatre goer - a consumer of philosophical and literary culture - contained a validity that the (now-made-awkward) consumption of popular Americanised culture did not. To embrace Americanised popular cultural expression was to buy into aesthetic or social anomie. Whereas, by contrast, political theatre, which brought the audience to this point of critical awareness, by the very act of engineering this situation, self-validated its radical and social worth. As Hare has stated:

I would suggest crudely that one of the reasons for the theatre's possible authority, and for its recent drift towards politics, is its unique suitability to illustrating an age in which men's ideals and practices bear no relation to each other; in which the public profession of, for example, socialism has often been reduced by the passage of history to wearying personal fetish.⁸³

The significance of all of the above formal innovations is that this returns us to the *politicisation of aesthetics*. As Sadie Plant rightly points out, the Situationists equated the free creation of art and poetry, cut-up, eclectic and innovative with an imaginative re-creation of society and demanded a new art for a new society and a new society for a new art.⁸⁴ Such conflation of the cultural with the socio-political, as we have noted, stretched to recognise the necessary structural coincidences between all aspects of cultural and social organisation. For the Situationists if society was to be classless without hierarchy, specialisation or separated from the everyday culture, that culture which Raymond Williams calls a whole way of life, then art must also be classless; aesthetic goals can be social goals. They thought that, if society is to be imaginatively recreated, then politics and social interactions, like art, have to

⁸³ David Hare, *The Early Plays* (Boston: faber and faber, 1992), p.3.

⁸⁴ See Sadie Plant, 'The Situationist International: A Case of Spectacular Neglect', *Radical Philosophy* 55, Summer, (1990).

be imaginative, playful and inclusive too. If culture is exclusive, alienating and rigid - reflecting the economic organisation of society - then art, like this society, must be attacked and destroyed. Thinkers of the calibre of Jorn argued that to end division in culture is homologous to ending divisions in society. The ultimate meaning of the SI's irreverent assault upon bourgeois sanctified culture was to engineer a society and situation which disrespected all aspects of bourgeois life and authority. To advocate *dérive* in culture was to promote the forcible or voluntary entry into hitherto restricted socio-political fields, institutions and other bourgeois forbidden spaces. For Debord, to wield power in culture was homologous to possessing power in politics. On a broader note, as an example of what Home calls the utopian tradition, Situationists through intermedialism strove to forge social and cultural equality via what Williams sums up rather neatly as a 'community of forms'.⁸⁵ Aesthetic solidarity became homologous to political solidarity. In respecting proletarian culture the SI respected that class *per se* and allowed that class to respect and revalue its own existence; although, paradoxically/illogically, the SI also maintained that capitalist or trash culture breeds a debased proletarian culture, whilst good - non-capitalist culture-engenders and supports superior social conditions.

Thinking in common with the SI, then, in diverse ways, post'68, the workers of political theatre appear to have realised the political fact that culture *is* a significant field of social struggle. To agitate, demonstrate, destroy, experiment, de-classify, modify and synthesise - both within and through - variant and antagonistic forms of proletarian and bourgeois culture, advertised their wider commitment to revolutionary struggle *in and by itself* i.e. good culture, plus good politics, equals the good society. Within post-'68 British political theatre, cultural and social revolution were re-unified, made structurally homologous.

⁸⁵ Williams, *Culture*, p. 156.

Chapter 5: The Society of the Spectacle

Everywhere revolutionaries, but nowhere the revolution. Situationist International, 1966.

Marxism Today is holding a symposium, 50 years after his death, on the Italian thinker Gramsci. Its marketing subsidiary, Central Committee Outfitters, is offering readers the appropriate T-shirt which sports an early 20th century Italian hammer and sickle... Designer Socialists can also buy a *Marxism Today* duvet cover. Charing-Cross Road shop sign.
Larry Law. *Spectacular Times*.

Two Directors of a Soviet drinks factory have been shot for leaving the fruit out of the fruit juice they were producing.
Larry Law, *Spectacular Times*.

Introduction: Guy Debord and *The Society of the Spectacle*

A critical concern with consumerism and commodification can be identified in numerous post-'68 political plays. To understand the significance of this particular thematic cluster we must turn to the work of Guy Debord and his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord, along with many other new-left philosophers such as Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre, argued that, in the post-war period, consumption of goods and commodities had assumed an unprecedented social significance.¹ In *The Society of the Spectacle* Debord wrote about how, in affluent Western capitalist societies, technological development and rationalised production methods meant that commodities - motor cars, washing machines, fridges, holidays, hi-fi, books, films, music, fashion, television and culture - could, in theory, be *consumed* by an ever widening population of all social classes. Debord suggested that, for its supporters, extended consumerism presented a symptom of social inclusion; a unified society. *The Society of the Spectacle* also made the case, however, that products were no longer consumed solely for their *use* value - a car transports its owner from A to B, whilst a beer refreshes and relaxes the consumer - but afforded a degree of social prestige to those who buy them, a something extra we might call 'surplus value'.² By displaying an allegiance to certain brands, the subject is embellished by commodities, granted a certain cachet, be it masculinity, femininity, freedom, coolness, cosmopolitanism, intellectuality or

¹ Sadie Plant, 'The Situationist International: A Case of Spectacular Neglect', in *What is Situationism? A Reader*, ed. by Stewart Home (AK Press, Edinburgh, 1996), p.154.

² Plant, in Home, p. 155.

rebelliousness. Reminiscent of Saussure's *langue* or Lacan's 'Symbolic Order'³, *The Society of the Spectacle* pointed out that objects and images form a visual syntax, a language system which stands in and speaks for modern subjects. In contemporary life, rather than communicate verbally, individuals construct a social sense of others by decoding what their commodities say about them. Pierre Bourdieu puts the case succinctly:

There are thus as many fields of preferences as there are fields of stylistic possibilities. Each of these worlds - drinks...or automobiles, newspapers or holiday resorts, design or furnishing of house or garden, not to mention political programmes - provides the small number of distinctive features which, functioning as a system of differences, differential deviations, allow the most fundamental social differences to be expressed...it can be seen that the total field of these fields offers well-nigh inexhaustible possibilities for the pursuit of distinction.⁴

Ultimately, these material marks of division possess that form of power the social-structuralist dubs 'symbolic capital'. However, homologous to the struggle for distinction we see fought out between vulgar and elitist culture in Chapter 4, commodities also have the symbolic power to inflict 'symbolic violence' on other less distinguished goods. And because Bourdieu concurs with Debord, we can say that their thinking in common suggests that the determined ownership of individual commodities is an indicator of consumer society's often malign struggle for socio/cultural *difference*.⁵ And because post-'68 playwrights were - directly or indirectly - informed by the preliminary analysis of *The Society of the Spectacle*, we can begin to understand why their political plays showed all sectors of the social spectrum in open and determined consumption.

In *The Party* (1973), for instance, Trevor Griffiths presented Joe Shawcross, a 'socialist' living in an expensive flat filled with a wide selection of luxurious and culturally desirable commodities. As the play opened the audience saw a large bed, David Hockney paintings and Shawcross disappear

³ F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (London, Duckworth, 1995). Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, (London: Routledge, 1993), for an index of Lacan's account of the Symbolic Order see 'The Symbolic Order', p. 327.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 226.

⁵ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 72-76 'Symbolic Capital: A Recognised Power' also Chapter 7, 'On Symbolic Power', pp. 163-170.

into a whole room purposefully built for clothes. Scene two opened on the family living room also furnished with fashionable products, large chesterfield chairs, stools, rugs, huge floor cushions, white carpets, top of the range hi-fi, mirror, shelves of hard backs, paintings, prints, decorative plants, two shelves of LPs, piles of journals and newspapers, a large colour TV and VTR (*The Party*, Act1/2). In *Magnificence* (1973) Howard Brenton set the play's economic social scene by having a Tory MP glide across the stage on an expensive motorised lawn mower, whilst counter-cultural activists avidly consume drugs, fads of fashion, and pop prints. In his later piece *Epsom Downs* (1977) the play opened at the Round House London when a small child appeared on stage wearing a toy Indian headdress, brandishing a plastic ray-gun, and flying a kite. Not satisfied with flying his kite the boy demands a 'Kermit frog' to fly from the kite. His baby sister moves quickly from screaming 'my want an orange' to 'my want a ginger biscuit with my orange' (*Epsom Downs* Act1). Lord Rack, a Labour Peer, has four breakfasts and consumes copious amounts of champagne. Throughout the performance Brenton showed that in his contemporary society, everything was, or assumed to be, democratically up for sale, songs from blind beggars, Gypsy heather, fortune telling, alcohol, bets upon horses, hot dogs, novelty chickens made from polystyrene cups, and, of course, sex. As such in *Epsom Downs* Brenton, in collaboration with Joint Stock, portrayed English society as an enormous commercial market, the Epsom Derby used as a symptomatic metaphor for the wider national economic climate.

The import of these inanimate articles of thoroughgoing consumerism, however, extended in all three plays beyond the literal object. In adherence to the received belief in the power of commodities to configure social distinction, in *The Party* simple articles like a pair of deck shoes signified to the spectator on one level that the wearer perhaps has a small boat, the shoes thus have a use value. On a second level the deck-shoes connote that the wearer belonged to a prestigious clique they might have recognised as the 'the sailing classes'. But in contrast to a nineteenth-century realist play, where furniture and furnishings marked out the social class of the central characters and so contributed to the orthodox theatrical 'societal' naturalist's scene-setting, in the post-'68 play entirely different social dynamics were at work.⁶ Contemporary objective properties evoked an emphatically modern and complex set of assumptions

⁶ Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre As A Sign System*, (London: Routledge, 1991), See 'Stage Picture :Levels of Operation', pp.146-149.

about the nature of identity, a notion of the subject born out of post-war consumer society.

In *The Party* the consumable preferences Griffiths' selected for Shawcross, over and above other 'absent' artefacts, provided small nuances or 'distinctive features' which functioned as a system of differences, and so allowed the dramatist to articulate fundamental social *difference*. In contrast to a depiction of the traditional bourgeois subject (we might see mahogany bookshelves, William-Morris Wallpaper or cut glass decanters - the objects connoting residual wealth or power) Griffiths' Shawcross represented a more contemporary, modish, middle class. Through these commodities as signs the performance encouraged the audience to construct a socio-cultural image of the economically successful, intelligent, well read, perhaps socially and politically powerful Shawcross, but also see that he is 'arty' 'stylish' and 'cultured'. Moreover, Griffiths afforded the spectator the opportunity to flesh out an objective individuality for Shawcross in *comparison* to the more rebellious, but less affluent, anarchist 'Grease-ball' who sports a bashed-up leather jacket and owns a clapped-out motor scooter (*The Party* Act 1). Written two years later and performed at the Nottingham Playhouse, Griffiths' *Comedians* (1975) also placed great significance upon the differential appearance of the would-be comedians, a manoeuvre designed to trigger a whole host of cultural assumptions and stereotypes attached to their apparel. The actor playing the docker, McBrain, enters the stage space wearing an old parka, jeans and boots, the builder Mick Connor sports a Wimpey orange and black donkey jacket over a crumpled hired evening suit, whilst the more affluent club owner Sammy Samuels smokes cigars, has a heavy 'finely cut' black overcoat, homburg hat, white silk scarf, attaché case and diamond cufflinks, commodities which 'do their work' for the audience's interpretative sense making (*Comedians* Act 1). What is more, the comedian's clothing imitated the dress-code of 'the-successful-comics' who appeared on the 1970s TV show *The Comedians*, for Griffiths dressed them this way to appear as a comedian.

Epsom Downs represented the power of signification commodities possess by deploying the Brechtian strategy of isolating socio-metric signs to concentrate the theatregoer's gaze onto significant objects.⁷ When Brenton positioned a can of lager, a bottle of champagne or brown ale next to each other upon an otherwise bare stage, each article assisted in the signification of

⁷ See Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 3: 'Brecht and Epic Theatre', pp. 79-111.

the different social classes represented within the abstract world of the play - and the external material social world - through their associative alcoholic brands of choice. The man 'down on his luck' drinks brown ale, Sandy, the proletarian, 'prefers' lager, whilst the champagne socialist consumes, of course, champagne. This semiotic juxtaposition therefore supported, perhaps, the current belief that Derby day had become a potent symbol of a unified England, a nation peacefully co existing side-by-side in and through economic and social cultural difference; the drinks and other visible merchandise social indicators of a differentiated, though unified, consumer society. In reality, though, Brenton created these 'spectacles of consumption' - whether abstract or material - to highlight the very socio/cultural *difference* Debord had identified in 1967. Hence Granddad's comment that the 'Toffs wear hats to make the rest of us feel bad' (*Epsom Downs Act 1*). Hence also the cans of lager, champagne and brown ale bottles, chicken wings, ginger biscuits, and coleslaw sandwiches, the array of goods Brenton arranged to display that all commodities have a *performative* value; the gestures of 'symbolic violence' that stigmatise social economic and cultural status via the semiotics of the different forms of consumption.

It was this 'symbolic' aspect of the commodity that specifically interested Debord. He argued that, in deciding to buy into the symbolic aspects of the market - chasing the imaginary 'symbolic capital' and social kudos they supposedly represent - the modern consumer, and consuming masses, had escaped into, and were living in, an *abstract* register. Being, for Debord, had been reduced to *appearing*, a realm of appearances he termed 'the society of the spectacle'. Debord wrote 'Understood on its own terms, the spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance'.⁸ In this new society of the spectacle, all what was once lived directly - political activity and cultural production, for example - had become mere representation, a social economy 'mediated by images'.⁹ People no longer participated in culture or politics but represented themselves as cultural or political through the conspicuous consumption of cultural or political artefacts, revolutionary literature or political magazines being two cases in point. Modern life, then, in all its manifestations, had, Debord maintained, been transposed into fakery and counterfeit, a performance, a show or drama; existence constructed from the available roles, stereotypes, and images 'offered' by the spectacle. Because of the abstract

⁸ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 14.

⁹ Debord, p. 12.

nature of these roles Debord argued that 'spectators' - consumers - must 'live outside themselves in the spectacle', alienated from their essential human reality, since, he says, 'the more one contemplates the less one lives'.¹⁰ And because this alienation was wholesale, the undeniable fact that the whole of society consumes (to whatever degree is irrelevant), Debord, therefore, theorised the 'proletarianisation of the world'.¹¹

The Situationist's identification of the proletarianisation of society, the democratisation of alienation, had important resonance for leftist politicians and playwrights, because, comparable to Langian ideas of communal madness, and the Occupation Movement's claim that students and intellectuals were alienated and exploited workers in the capitalist structure, writers and audiences, whatever place they inhabited in the spectrum of class or society, could, again, claim a certain proletarian homology with the historical struggle of the masses. Given this community of alienation, the selection of 'anti-spectacle' plays I have identified in this chapter set about revealing the artificiality endemic in the society of the spectacle. In aesthetic terms, by displaying recognisable clusters of anti-spectacles, Griffiths' *The Party* and *Comedians*, Brenton's *Epsom Downs* and *Magnificence*, along with David Hare's *Knuckle* (1972) - a play I will analyse later - belong to that genre of avant-garde sceptical art Richard Murphy identifies as *Fiktionskritik*, the 'critique of fictions'.¹²

Spectacle-Busting/Exposing the Public Figure

Post-'68 political theatre set about toppling counterfeit social situations, in its most basic gestures, with characters or imagery I will conceptualise as 'spectacle-busting'. For example, in *Epsom Downs*, Pearce, a horse trainer, contradicts the spectacle that the Epsom Downs have been 'bought for the nation' and as such the 'Derby belongs to everyone', by stating the downs are in fact 'a bed soon to be trampled upon by the common herd' (*Epsom Downs* Act 1). In the same vein the spectacle-buster 'Granddad', notably shorn of all commodities and possessions (except for a simple canvas stool, a small tin lunch box and a cloth cap), recalls how Queen Victoria insisted that her working-class gardeners remain out of sight on pain of dismissal, arguing that the Derby is simply a conspiracy between the trainers and jockeys to exploit the

¹⁰ Debord, p. 23.

¹¹ Debord, p. 21.

¹² Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 53.

working man. Later, in the same play, Emily Davison, a real-life spectacle-buster (she threw herself under the King's horse in 1913 to ruin the spectacle of that year's Derby race), points out that though she was badly crushed, the King only asked after the horse (*Epsom Downs* Act 1).

Other scenes openly critical of the consumer society showed that contemporary modern working-class families, far from prosperous, often found themselves homeless and commercially exploited. In *Epsom Downs* just such a family live in a motor-caravan in a garage, and are cheated on throughout the play by unscrupulous traders. A blind busker feigns his disability to persuade Sandy, the father, to buy a tune. Commodities, like the kite he buys his young son, are revealed as expensive 'bits of plastic and four sticks' (*Epsom Downs* Act 1). The child's plastic ray-gun, Indian headdress and felt frog are merely cheap imitations. Brenton's critique of the society of the spectacle, though, went beyond recognisable societal objects to the realm of commodified discourse. In *Epsom Downs*, fortune-tellers provide false predictions, evangelists sell religion as any other commodity, and young women live in fantasy worlds propagated by teen pop magazines (*Epsom Downs* Act 1).

Hare approached the comprehensive artificiality of the society of the spectacle in his play *Knuckle*, first performed at the Comedy Theatre, London. Set in the 'present-day', the early 70s, the bar the play's action revolved around romantically calls itself the 'Shadow of the Moon', but the club is, in fact, run-down, seedy, and situated in inner-city Croydon. Yet, still, events advertised as 'Hawaiian nights' are held in the 'Paradise room' located 'just beyond William Tell's Alpine Grotto' (*Knuckle* Act 1/2). The nightclub's clients are absurdly encouraged to 'hurry up to heaven', but *Knuckle* showed that, in contemporary Britain, the promise of 'grass skirts, sweet music and good food', in reality amounted to no more than 'ice-cream made from whale blubber', 'sausages full of sawdust' and Polynesian dancers wearing 'wigs made from horse hair' (*Knuckle* Act1/8). The detective Curly begins the play by soberly asking for a lemonade and, critical of his bourgeois background, argues - à la the May'68 *enragé* - for the destruction of the public spectacle with the 'steel-tipped boot' or 'the knuckleduster', but, eventually he is exposed as a hypocritical alcoholic, gives up his quest for truth and joins his father in exploitative finance (*Knuckle* Act1/5). His missing and sexually-promiscuous sister, the hippie 'Leg-over Sarah', far from liberated in any Reichian way - is sexually possessive. Similarly, *Epsom Downs* showed a respectable Police Inspector, 'Blue', furtively drinking whisky out of a hip flask. He can only maintain his superior 'public

image', though, by demanding that a bunny girl turn away. Adhering to a Debordian logic, in these negative scenes from the everyday spectacle, Hare and Brenton were suggesting that the image, what is seen, is more important than the reality of a situation.

Interestingly, the aside played an instrumental part in Brenton's broader anti-spectacle procedure. In *Magnificence* the 'aside' underlined the artificiality of contemporary politicians. When the two Tory MPs 'Alice' and 'Babs' meet, the audience initially observed them warmly greeting each other, shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries. But through the aside, a dramatic tactic which allowed the dramatist to move from the abstract to the *platea* and back, these social manners were uncovered as a performance:

Alice: Nice of you to have me come up, Babs. (*Aside*) Thinking, I wonder what the old man wants?

Babs: (*Aside*) Thinking, I piddle and he comes running.

(*Magnificence* Scene 4)

Furthermore, Brenton's aside set out to indicate how the post-war political classes used the media to manipulate their public appearance and private reality for popular consumption. For example, Babs, an elder statesman of the Conservative party, remarks that, when he lost his constituency at the general election local papers, a commodified discourse, reported that he, "He bowed out of public life with effortless dignity, in a flurry of optimism for new horizons." Whereas, contradictorily, he tells the audience, 'Actually I cried. I raged and screamed...No, I did not go gentle into the House of Lords' (*Magnificence* Scene 4). In this same section of dialogue Brenton also critiqued the fiction of TV and the modern politician's awareness of its contemporary influence. In a further aside to the audience Babs notes that the new generation of MPs sell themselves by 'artificial means' - sunlamps - like 'breakfast cereal', whilst others treat public life as a performance. Old Tories, for instance, 'play' out being 'the-elder-statesman ...put out to grass' (*Magnificence* Scene 4).

In its role as *Fiktionskritik* *Magnificence* proposed, that contemporary politicians, no different to other commodities, were in the business of selling themselves to the public as the spectacle of *the* elder statesmen, *the* politician, *the* public servant. Moreover, Brenton was arguing that, equivalent to how breakfast cereals are advertised and sold to the consumer by their appearance upon the TV, a medium which 'framed' and validated their public image,

politicians of the spectacle commonly manipulated this medium to their own ends. Although the modish assault on the spectacle *Magnificence* epitomised must be considered as a British *interpretation* of Debord's critical evaluation of the society of the spectacle, Brenton's play represented French theory well. Debord wrote once these 'mere images' are taken on board by the framing devices of the spectacle, the TV in particular, they are inevitably 'transformed into real beings'.¹³ Reverse transmutation occurs because the logic of the spectacle implies that "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear."¹⁴ Likewise, Brenton, who admits that he was 'influenced by some situationist texts', remarks

The Situationists describe our world as the "society of the spectacle". There is a screen called public life which is reported on the telly and in the newspapers. This version of public life is a spectacle, it operates within its own laws. It's a vast intricate confidence game.¹⁵

Thinking in common with Debord, then, in *Magnificence* Brenton demonstrated that the images and personas mediated by the spectacle, particularly TV, are often counterfeit, public life is merely a performance, a show. The play argued that, in the present-day society of the spectacle, image mattered more than reality since form had displaced content. Babs encapsulates this critical attitude well when he states that, despite never having had 'a political thought in [his] life', by appearing on TV his 'honeyed words' ensure that he is received and trusted as a 'politician' (*Magnificence* Scene 4). In many post-'68 plays, however, image clusters uncovered the genuine world of the political establishment; a social sphere characterised by drunkenness, hypocrisy, childishness, weakness and nepotism. Put in broader terms, anti-spectacle dramas recommended that the audience be made aware that, in the society of the spectacle, television and the mass media blurred the distinction between truth and fiction, form and content by rendering present-day reality problematic.

¹³ Debord, p. 17.

¹⁴ Debord, p. 15.

¹⁵ David Edgar, 'Ten Years Of Political Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 32 (1978), p.25.

Breaking the Illusion: Forms

Critical theory has to be communicated in its own language - the language of contradiction, dialectical in form as well as content. Guy Debord¹⁶

Television: Visual and Political Equivalence

Television's ability to distort reality, and so collude with the maintenance of the spectacle, is just one reason why TV sets and television programmes assumed the political and cultural significance they did in post-'68 plays. The popular medium's power to maintain the spectacle also explains why clusters of 'screens', be they those of the cinema or the small screen of the TV, are also consistently attacked in the milieu's plays. On a very literal level, in Brenton's *Weapons of Happiness* (1976) the older worker Alf, berated by the factory manager to 'go and warm your hands up 'front a your telly set' rather than take real political action states, 'If I kick the telly in...will things get any better? On the whole I'd say...yes' (*Weapons of Happiness Act1/9*). *AC/DC* (1970) made the case that the contemporary subject's mind had been colonised, made passive, politically ineffectual, by images and ideas inculcated from socio-cultural dominance of the Television. Jed in *Magnificence* recalls how he went to see a film 'boring, glossy tat, untouchable being on the silver screen', until a drunk threw a bottle of wine through the projected image:

For the rest of the film, there was that bottle shaped hole...One blemish on the screen. But somehow you couldn't watch the film from then...Bomb 'em. Again and again. Right through their silver screen. Disrupt the spectacle. The obscene parade, bring it to a halt. Scatter the dolly birds, let advertisements bleed...Murderous display. (*Magnificence* Scene 8)

To understand what motivated these political playwrights, and their common antagonism towards TV completely, however, we must develop Debord's own argument further. To begin with he noted that, in producing labour-saving devices through 'economic growth' - the world of survival guaranteed by capitalism - liberated spectators had more free time to consume more and more images and products propagated by TV programmes and other forms of advertising, and so the society of the spectacle was self-propelling

¹⁶ Debord, p.143-144.

through its 'monopolisation of the realm of appearances'.¹⁷ What is more, broader ongoing anti-spectacle criticism is stridently anti-television because it believes that television reduces all imagery, particularly dissident and oppositional imagery, to a sort of disorientating visual cultural and political *equivalence*. As the anti-spectacle writer Larry Law argues in his booklet *Spectacular Times*, in the society of the spectacle TV downgrades the 'Jackal' or the 'Black Panther' (historical criminals) to a banal parity with those of the 'Penguin' or the 'Joker' (fictional 'bad-guys' featured in *Batman*); 'the blood is real but the language is the language of Gotham city'.¹⁸

A confrontation with TV's propensity towards visual equivalence underpinned the formal gestures of *The Party*. For example, by projecting the news reports of the riots in Paris the attendees at the political soiree are watching on a smaller TV onto the back wall of the National Theatre, Griffiths notionally transformed the box-shaped stage-space into a giant TV screen. However, he juxtaposed the revolutionary *événements* of Paris '68 with prosaic and trite descriptions of the shape of the new fifty-penny piece, boxing matches, reports from furniture exhibitions, 'Danish Fortnight', and the weather. Equally, authentic visual political images, as per television, were mixed with other banal imagery when the performance morphed large projected images of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky with sexualised 'fun pop prints'. At other junctures in the performance, Griffiths demonstrated commodity equivalence further by playing the Rolling Stones' *Street Fighting Man* as these disparate images blended together. Political icons such as Marx and Trotsky, then, were indicated to be politically *reduced*, merely consumed as one more image amongst a plethora of other commodities, be they vinyl records, pornography or the weather report. Simultaneously, Griffiths drew the spectator's attention to the reduction of political commitment and revolutionary dissent to simply another image of entertainment and bourgeois amusement. For by superseding film from the 'night of the barricades' with a collection of well known Parisian activists - Cohn-Bendit, Alan Geismar, Jacques Sauvageot, Yves Niauxdet, Jean Labib, Alain Krivine, Henri Weber - Griffiths made manifest the *enragés* contestation that the media contained the political revolt of the *événements* by turning its 'leaders' into no more than media stars. Viénet wrote at the time 'the press, radio, and television, in their search for leaders, found no one besides...Geismar, Sauvageot, and Cohn-Bendit...They became the inseparable and photogenic

¹⁷ Debord, p. 28 & 15.

¹⁸ Larry Law, *Spectacular Times no 3: The Media* (London: Dark Star Press, 1993), p.13.

stars of a spectacle hastily pasted over the revolutionary reality'.¹⁹ That is, *The Party* signalled how the very form itself, TV or Film, levitated revolutionaries to 'media stars' so they can then be, in a sense, disarmed, sold back to revolutionary consumers as cartoon images or comic-strip heroes. To make the performative aspect of political struggle clear, *The Party* featured a young anarchist 'into street theatre' 'Greaseball', and a new-left cult hero 'flash ford' the 'Gower Street Terror', a literary superman 'sorting Cuba out' (*The Party Act* 1/2).

It was not only visual consumerism which *The Party* and other plays critiqued, but political consumerism. As Debord's book noted, the power of the spectacle is such that even rebellion or dissent against the spectacle can be commodified, *recuperated*, resold to those who profess to oppose the society of the spectacle. Rebellion, like any other raw material, can be taken by the forces of production and repackaged, sold back to revolutionary consumers in the form of T-shirts, badges posters, music, film, and fashion.²⁰ Radical chic, designer socialism, and 'Marxism today duvet covers', then, do not offer release from the spectacle through concrete rebellion, but simply dress the rebel in the 'image of rebellion, revolution turned into a global fancy dress party'.²¹ Just as the spectacle offers pseudo prestigious goods to be coveted, it also offers 'false models of revolution to local revolutionaries'.²² This is an incredibly wild and outrageous suggestion for it undermines the whole superstructure of western rebellion, particularly the May'68 events. The concept of the false revolutionary implied that the whole political spectacle of adopting 'struggle gear', adopting revolutionary iconography, wearing Mao jackets and caps, or soviet button badges, meant nothing. Capitalism controlled its opponents returning revolution against commerce and commodity society to its own allied agenda, needs and profit. Knowing this explains why on such political spectacles as the Grovesnor Square demo British Situationists met the "Ho-Ho-Ho-Chi-Minh" chants of

¹⁹ René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* (London: Autonomedia/Rebel Press, 1992), p. 30.

²⁰ As Raoul Vaneigem put it, in the society of the spectacle 'the-housewife-who-uses-Fairy-Snow' is held to be qualitatively different from 'the-housewife-who-uses Tide', and, similarly, modern society believes that the 'Labour voter differs from the Conservative Voter, and the Communist from the Christian' or capitalist. But in reality, Vaneigem suggested that 'identification with anything at all, like the need to consume anything at all, becomes more important than brand loyalty to a particular type of car, idol, or politician...the form is irrelevant just so long as they lose themselves in it'. See Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London, Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), p. 136-137.

²¹ For a wider and more contemporary analysis and engagement with ideas that critique the society of the spectacle see the complete 'Pocket Book Series' *Spectacular Times*: # 1-14: Dark Star Press, (1991). I cite in this instance # 14, *Bigger Cages Longer Chains*.

²² Debord, p. 37.

middle-class 'revolutionaries' with the equally political banal "Hot Chocolate Drinking Chocolate", a subversive gesture which referred to the rebel's idiosyncratic political dissent as another product chosen in preference to another brand. In the same way the consumer chooses Horlicks over Ovaltine, British Situationists were suggesting revolutionaries select Marxism rather than Maoism.

Thinking in common with the British SI, political theatre performances critiqued the commodification of dissent. In *Magnificence*, for instance, Will appears dressed up in the form of the fashionable revolutionary. His 'hippyish' appearance, tatty clothes, 'Daisies sown on the arse' of his jeans, is embellished with other cultural signs and products. Wanting to appear radical Will wears a Che-Guevara T-shirt onto which Ho-Chi-Minh badges are pinned, he also has a poster of Che Guevara dead in the Bolivian jungle in his toilet (*Magnificence* Scene 6). Initially these images signified to the audience, parallel to the orthodox commodities I mention above, Will's place in the market of cultural and revolutionary imagery. The semiotic coherence and complementary nature of signifying cultural artefacts is finally signified by his drug of choice, LSD. From these variant commodities the audience could construct a coherent image of this political and cultural stereotype; someone who has bought into the role of the peacenik from the available images in the ideological supermarket. The nuances of the symbolic revolutionary market-place were highlighted further by his 'semiotic difference' to Jed, who, though critical of Will's spectacular performance, adopts another comparable spectacular revolutionary role, the 'Situationist'. Because he was a 'Situationist', he chooses the drug 'speed', a narcotic which connoted and represented a more radical rebelliousness (*Magnificence* Scene 6).

In *The Party*, spectacular political theories and revolutionary subject positions were shown in equal abundance. Comparable to the cornucopia of other visual products and consumables the play highlighted, the performance featured members of the Black Power Movement, International Socialists, an Anarchist, British New Left intellectuals, sociology lecturers, agit-prop performers, left-wing publishers, playwrights, journalists, and revolutionary communists. Moreover, *The Party* showed these political consumers peddling and representing themselves by their own adoption of various political brands, products and 'favourite theories'. Homological to orthodox consumers, they are to be distinguished and differentiated in the abstract play, and material social life, by their adopted political roles and personas. This commodification of

political culture had to be accepted even more so by the audience when they were encouraged to make the connection that these political consumers also produced political artefacts and images with specific markets, brands and loyal consumers. They write for *The Guardian*, *New Left Review*, produce TV and street plays, academic books, tracts and lectures which in turn are bought and patronised in this particular discursive market by students, counter-cultural radicals, new-left and literary intelligentsia who adopt these products as similar badges of socio-cultural prestige and difference. But true to the theories of the spectacle *The Party* exposed their political consumption and commodification of revolutionary thought as utter image - a 'fancy dress party' of impotent rebellion. This is why Griffiths juxtaposes, punctures, and punctuates the leftist intelligentsia's 'political party' with real footage of the violent *événements* taking place on the same night in Paris (*The Party* Act 1/2).

The critique of spectacular revolutionaries was taken further than the abstract world of the play, though. When *The Party* played the audience TV film coverage of the 'night of the barricades', so mirroring the news bulletin the play's false-revolutionaries are watching, the dramatic and political strategy was to make the audience aware of *their* own complicit spectatorship and vicarious consumption of political imagery and spectacular revolutionary activity. Analogous to orthodox commodities, the play was critically suggesting that here in the auditorium the theatre spectator too was living political life vicariously. Political and revolutionary activity had been reduced to something they were looking at and perhaps thinking about, but not something they were experiencing or taking part in. In short, the real object of criticism was no longer only the abstract spectacular revolutionaries in the play, those revolutionaries the audience were watching 'watching' the *événements*, but those who, even more absurdly, had paid to watch a fictional political play in which they watch others passively consuming political activity, that is, *they* - the audience members - were the political consumers and spectators the play critiqued. The spectator's own rebellion, like that of the spectacular revolutionaries in *The Party*, and radicals featured in other plays (in *Magnificence* Scene 1 we see housing activists posing for snapshots to post on the wall), had been debunked to be no more than appearance and imagery. John McGrath, for example, argued that, by 'entering' or 'occupying' a bourgeois-theatre space, political dramas and playwrights 'are not contributing to the creation of a genuinely new oppositional theatre' but 'become the 'product' of a 'nationalised industry'. Moreover, 'they are in constant danger of being appropriated [recuperated] in

production by the very ideology they set out to oppose. The process, the building, the publicity machine, the free interval drinks budget, all of these can turn opposition into novelty'.²³

Moreover, if post-'68 political theatregoers consumed political plays as commodities for their attendant intellectual kudos, it was this political product *The Party* ultimately set out to subvert. Mocking the wholesale playful spectacle of revolution the fictional and real intelligentsia were performing in the theatre, Sloman mocks in a little 'boy's voice', 'Excuse me is this where they are going to have the revolution?' (*The Party Act 1/2*). Having paid to consume a political play, Sloman's anti-spectacle rhetoric forced the viewer to break their own spectacular fantasies and come to the radical awareness that, reduced to the equivalence of television, the theatre, as political commodity, was also *not* real life, and not real politics.

Indeed, the play highlighted the residual artificiality of television *and* drama when Sloman argues that all one can expect of a ninety-minute play is a fake. On a par with the play *The Party*, he suggests that serious drama had become simply equivalent to other forms of recuperative representation, which repackaged oppositional modes of dissent back to consumers. Speaking of drama and all other forms of spectacular representation - political tracts, socialist documentaries, political journals and agit-prop plays - Sloman states 'It doesn't make any *difference*...the only thing you're allowed to put in to the system is that which can be assimilated and absorbed by it. Joe this is a society that has "matured" on descriptions of its inequity and injustice. Poverty is one of its best favoured *spectacles*' (*The Party Act 3/1*). Concurring with this anti-media attitude, *Magnificence* presented Veronica who works in the media industry making 'political' films and documentaries for the current affairs programme *World in Action*. A critical voice in the performance identified Veronica to be a 'media bitch' who turns out 'fascist crap', arguing that the TV intelligentsia 'mess up' and recuperate political struggles by 'getting us on the box' (*Magnificence Scene 1*). *The Party* and *Magnificence* also launched a scathing critique which argued that contemporary documentaries and modern drama both made a living out of other people's struggles and misery, a bleak existence it had reclaimed as one of 'its favoured *spectacles*'. In *The Party*, for instance, Sloman argues that 'Bad housing, class divisive schools, plight of the sick and the aged, the alienating indignities of work...Jesus man we can't get

²³ John McGrath, 'The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 35, (1979), pp.46-47.

enough of it. It's what makes us "humane" seeing all that, week in week out... Wednesday plays? It's the Liberal heartland' (*The Party Act* 3/1).

Material v Abstract Show: ('Getting it real')

In contrast to these confrontational strategies *Magnificence* attempted to bring the spectacle to a halt - 'get it real' as the Situationist Jed demands - in a rather different way. Accepting the premise that life and revolution had been reduced to performance, Brenton sought to create 'a spectacle against the spectacle' (*Magnificence* Scene 6). Working on the received knowledge that many aspects of the everyday spectacle are a show, a performance, a repetition of stock stereotypes and adopted personas gleaned from a selection of socially acceptable parts, *Magnificence* set out to render this performativity comprehensible by dramatically over-exposing its own theatrical and material representations of everyday life. The opening scene, for instance, although in part naturalistic, owed more to a circus performance or clowning than the political or social realism normally associated with serious political drama. When the young housing activists attempt to break into the house they intend to occupy, the revolution cannot begin because the door is locked, and, whilst they are banging upon the door and discussing offstage what action to take, the door knob falls of onto the stage floor. Will comments 'Well that's the revolution. No doorknob to get in and start it' (*Magnificence* Scene 1). Next, Brenton treated the audience to a slapstick routine in which performers waved the end of a ladder wildly outside a window, before it smashed through the glass, leaving a hole for the actor's head to comically peer through. Later the stage set became a tentative performance space as tins of baked bean and other foodstuffs flew through the air in an overtly rehearsed performance. Scene two resisted the verisimilitude of naturalism further still by representing the house the radicals are occupying upon a large painted drop cloth. In other scenes *Magnificence* overtly parodies, and refers to, stock visual scenes from television and cinema. A good illustration of this is when Mary brings to mind a particularly overused cinematic cliché, the-lover-who-only-just-makes-it-to-the-train-to-say-goodbye, when at the last minute she has a change of heart and dashes to meet her lover Jed at the prison gates (*Magnificence* Scene 5). The prison-gates example is a particularly key passage for here because, by clearly illustrating his own inter-textual use of clichéd cultural imagery, Brenton drew a

parallel with the predominant inter-textual theatricality of life *per se*, and so *Magnificence* highlighted how in the spectacle life ultimately ends imitating art.

Magnificence built upon the idea of an all-pervasive social theatricality - both in the play itself and the everyday - when Maoist revolutionary slogans were chanted mantra-like from behind the backdrop. For, as the unseen actor recited political catechisms the effect was to provide the spectator with a well-rehearsed ritualistic performance and, like the political theories we see performed as 'party pieces' in *The Party*, written-in to the scene to signal the contemporary concern with the blind-consumption of political sloganeering and the inevitable commodification of rebelliousness. For a political playwright to assert the acquisition of political ideology is part of the spectacle is, again, a radical shift in the position of political drama. In orthodox naturalism the 'apparent' spontaneity of realistic dramatic depictions makes words and political acts seem original, the genuine expression of the feelings and will of the subject saying and doing them. Hence naturalism reflects the ideological assumptions of bourgeois individualism, and reinforces the idea that theoretical utterances are genuine expressions of an autonomous - though politicised - free subject. But when a post'68 performance made words no longer appear spontaneous, appear rehearsed, political playwrights transmitted the fact that they *pre-existed* the speaker. Political dogmas became reconfigured as socio-cultural pre-packaged ideological commodities. In other sections of *Magnificence*, in keeping with the logic of visual or commodity equivalence, Brenton amalgamated the chanting from the *Thoughts of Mao* with the communal juggling scene in which provisions are thrown through the air in a comparably well-rehearsed performance. When Jed leads 'At the sign of the Third World War' to which other voices reply 'at the sign of the Third World War, the whole structure of Imperialism will collapse', the political performance is parodied when Jed changes to calling 'Baked beans' followed by Veronica, 'corned beef' then Jed, 'baked beans', Veronica again, 'Irish stew' to which all reply 'Baked beans' (*Magnificence* Scene 1). *Magnificence* evoked spectacular equivalence and the political spectacle once more when criticised for wearing the Che-Guevara T-shirt Will remarks 'just a shirt! Could be Marilyn Monroe on there, or Benny Hill...Mickey Mouse. Steve McQueen. Apollo moon landing. Stars an' stripes. Hammer an' Sickle...'S just a shirt' (*Magnificence* Scene 6).

Moreover, the case can be made that, through its own multiplication of aesthetic gestures - *Magnificence* had elements of comedy, slapstick, farce, political theories, sexual imagery, music, ballet, and cabaret - the play reduced

each form of art to a comparable degree zero of spectacular equivalence. For instance, the 'expressionistic' scene five (the stage space flooded with red lights and revolutionary banners as Lenin gesticulated) was downgraded to one more aesthetic amongst others through its combination with other forms, such as Brechtian 'bare stage', vague naturalism, or knockabout Punch and Judy. Such a clashing of forms possessed an anti-spectacle rationale because, by mixing together different forms of theatre, which were undoubtedly commodities in their own right (each form coming with its attendant added value in its cultural consumption), Brenton refused to provide the spectator/consumer with what Richard Murphy identifies as the 'false consolations of form': theatre as product. Instead, by creating a 'non-organic form', and so 'emphasising the fragmentary and incomplete quality of the work' Brenton, conforming to Murphy's criteria of the avant-garde writer, exposed the play's 'constructed and its artificial nature'. As a result *Magnificence's* audience could no longer 'find consolation either in a sense of formal harmony and totality, or in the illusion that the work contains a complete and self-sufficient meaning':

Instead, the initial sense of alienation and shock at the disappointment of its conventionalised expectations pushes the audience towards a more accepting stance in which it must take responsibility itself for piecing together the disparate components of the work, and most significantly, for producing its meaning.²⁴

As a commodity, then, the audience had to understand that in *Magnificence*, and many other fragmented post-'68 plays, their meaning was their virulent inter-textuality. Montages of theatrical forms advertised their own theatrical artifice and, at the same time, produced a devaluation of dramatic fiction. This aesthetic strategy was necessary because, if the spectacle-busting play aimed to be a 'spectacle against the spectacle', it declined to join the spectacle by offering coherent forms which, unlike the spectacle, claimed to represent the truth. The only truth that the show as commodity offered for the consumer was that the society of the spectacle - like a play - was an artifice, a show. In stark contrast to the hypocritical spectacle which claimed to be real but is really a show, *Magnificence* admitted to being a performance.

²⁴ Murphy, p. 79.

Epsom Downs achieved a degree of socio-aesthetic honesty by offering dramatic representations more artificial than anything presented in *Magnificence*. One blatant example of this would be Brenton's use of adult actors to perform as children. When large adults squashed into small pushchairs pushed by other adults, the play not only signalled its artificiality, and a repudiation of the naturalistic forms of television, say, but in addition highlighted the actor's performance. The actor as child also functioned as a social counterbalance to the artificial performance of the adult self in the spectacle. To make this reversed role-playing apparent, actors repeat and adopt stereotypical childish actions, redolent of the adult who acts at being 'the politician' or 'the revolutionary'. *Inter alia* nightly audiences were required to observe the adopted *image* of childhood, not a child. Conversely, when the actor 'playing Sandy' drew upon stereotypical images of the working class, fag hanging out of the side of the mouth, drinking lager, betting, and dribbling a football, spectators were forced to acknowledge that he too is simply acting out an adopted adult part. *Epsom Downs*' child/adult strategy had political points to make because it asked pertinent questions about reading. If the audience accepted the adult as child, despite the physical anomaly, their cultural suspension of disbelief suggested that, as victims of the spectacle, they were prepared to accept many other performances - anything put upon a stage or screen - as representative of reality. To accept the actor Sandy as a working class father, would be indistinguishable from maintaining a blind spectatorship of other forms of the spectacle which support artificial representations and states of consciousness - the television in particular. Whereas, by sustaining one's *disbelief* as a spectator of a performance, the theatre's framing function was busted. Operating in this register all other social representations of the performance had to be interpreted as openly dramatic constructs.

Of course the determined spectator, heavily inculcated to accepting that all forms of representation refer to an abstract other 'real' reality, may have suspended their disbelief, accepting the play as a representation or image of the real Derby and real people. The theatrical low-tech devices employed by *Epsom Downs* posed no more of a problematic than a nineteenth-century naturalist drama with its painted backdrop of pots and pans or Scandinavian forestry. Presented with this residual cultural situation, Brenton went to great lengths to break the dramatic and everyday spectacle with increasingly un-real spectacular visuals. In the Derby scenes, for instance, the horses the jockeys rode around the enclosure were, in fact, naked actors stripped of clothes.

Although restrained with bridles and reins the horse-actors offered asides to the audience. As well as talking human horses Brenton challenged the audience with actors absurdly playing at being 'the Epsom course' and 'the Derby horse race', whilst other members of the company represented the stature of the real life jockey by walking upon their knees (*Epsom Downs Act 2*).

What the performance offered, then, was not the Derby itself but the *absence* of the image of the Derby. Rather than cast short actors as jockeys, theatre workers pointed to the *absence* of the jockey - as the available tall actors comically shuffled around upon their knees, the audience became aware of the presence of the *actor*. When the bare horse actors addressed the audience, Brenton steered the spectator away from passive or unquestioning acceptance of the play as the Derby. In reality, in making *Epsom Downs* Brenton doggedly refused to reproduce a media created spectacle. If the Epsom Derby existed as another example of a romanticised 'favourite spectacle', perhaps un-problematically reproduced by its televised image, this dramatic reproduction disturbed the show by drawing the spectator's attention to the cruel existential reality of the sporting spectacle. For example, by crawling around upon their knees the actors indicated to the audience that the horse-racing industry forces jockeys to keep their weight down to stay in work. As the horse-actors struggled to support their full-size jockeys the play drew attention to the harsh physical exploitation horses experience in this spectacle. The brutality of the race was emphasised in this commentary, relayed by an actor who 'played' at being the course:

I am the Derby Course. Don't be fooled by lush green curves in the countryside. I am dangerous. I am a bad-tempered bastard. I bite legs. On me the second-rate burst blood vessels and heart valves. Only the fast, the brave and the beautiful get anything out of me. First, I am a killer gallop, up a long hill. Then I sweep down, curving to the left, to the real ball-tearer, a vicious left-hand corner, Tattenham Corner, turned at forty miles an hour. Then the straight run to the finish, but down another hill...that's me. Switchback. Twisty. Feared by the hardened man and animal. To win the Derby – out think me. Then kick my brains out. Or I'll break you apart. (*Epsom Downs Act 2*)

What is more, this description not only relayed to the spectator the physical trauma and danger the course posed to the animals, but also indicated

that they interrogate all visual appearances, 'don't be fooled by lush green curves in the countryside'. Rather than passively accept the spectacle of the race as pleasing 'semiotic experience' - the actor who appears is 'festooned with the regalia of the race' - *Epsom Downs* suggested spectators search beneath its appearance to discover the reality of the spectacle, indeed any spectacle.

As we have seen, the performance was not only about public spectatorship of the Derby, but all forms of spectatorship. The briefness of the Derby scene in *Epsom Downs* - it lasted only 2 ½ minutes - referred to how within the continuing spectacle life is reduced to brief moments of excitement, and that these moments are only consumed passively. As the term spectatorship denotes, subjects merely watch the significant events of everyday life, rather than take part in them. In the *Epsom Downs* performance the annual horserace provides only a fleeting possibility of excitement. Cultural participation is reduced to 'cheering on' or placing bets upon commodities, in this case horses, rather than consumables. The fate of the equine runners and human riders, stands in for the absent experience of the spectator.

As an antidote to the state of things, like anti-oedipal or OM drama, orgasmotheatre or theatre *dérive*, anti-spectacle theatre had to provide alternative representations, forms of drama which de-pacified the indolent spectator - instructed, educated, and involved the audience - in order to rediscover theatre's *use value*. Viewed from this instructive or participatory aspect *Epsom Downs*, as utilitarian product, engaged the audience in the deconstruction of the race. Its literal mechanical descriptions and anti-spectacular imagery educated its members about the true nature of the commodity known as 'the Derby'. By the same token it used *itself* as an alternative reproduction of the race, foregrounding its own man-made status, to indicate to the spectator the synthetic quality of the actual race. If Brenton had designed the play around the demands of naturalistic representation, that is, dramatic verisimilitude, this would have reproduced the spectacle as life itself and, in a way, would have been to leave the spectator in the false consciousness of the abstract spectacle by not awakening him/her to the fact that the play *Epsom Downs* and the Epsom Derby - and everyday life - is in reality a show.

The Bare-Stage Strategy

If these anti-spectacle plays subverted the spectacle through revealing the spectator's own spectatorship or made evident the artifice by artifice, an equally potent effect was created by the use of sparse 'poor' stages. For if the spectacle is a society built upon an ever expanding economy of visual images and high-tech commodities sold and supported by the technological tricks, visual illusions, and large budget of the TV, it seems politically and aesthetically coherent to oppose it with a scarcity of imagery and objects. Moreover, by creating a low-tech theatre dramatists sought to maintain a cultural and philosophical divide between drama and other forms of technological communication. To give just a few examples, in *Epsom Downs* the downs were simply represented by small low-tech mounds, six-inch squares of grass signified the race course, and the large crowds played by actors simply moving from one place upon the stage to another. In other scenes the crowd broke apart and, reorganised by 'The Derby' actor, reformed into a representation of the runners and riders in the race. In *Magnificence*, a crude punt and an academic gown stood in for the river Cam and Cambridge University. In *Knuckle Hare* converted the bare-stage into a beach by merely placing actors in bathing costumes.

Also, because the bare stages and poor properties failed to provide the spectator with easy spectacles to consume, rounded and complete images of daily life, performances forced the spectator to become involved with the meaning making and reproduction of the stage picture itself. Rather than rely upon dominant technological media to provide coherent images, the bare-stage strategy invited spectators to rediscover their latent potential for creative reproduction by imagining the Epsom Downs, the horses, the race, the course, or the 'Crumbles beach'. In filling in, like a children's colouring book, the rest of the bare-stage picture, spectators became involved in the very production of the show; no longer passive consumers but *active* creative producers.

The bare-stage strategy can be considered strategically important in other ways. The visual absence of stage imagery highlighted the everyday *presence* of those 'favourite spectacles' which hypothetically had colonised the mind of the subject of the spectacle. For instance, in *Magnificence*, Brenton made the 'English Country Garden' or 'University punting scene' manifest in the mind's eye of the spectator, rather than reproducing a concrete facsimiles upon the stage. Put differently, when the Tory MPs Alice and Babs 'pole' upon the

empty stage on a wooden punt, or Alice rides upon the bare boards with a lawnmower, the dramatist relied upon the audience's inculcated stereo-cultural images of each situation - the mental-pictures re-produced by glossy magazines or television. Hence Will can describe the trip to Alice's home by drawing upon common cultural imagery of an English country garden. He says 'Lovely day. Into Hertfordshire. Got off at a little station. And 'ouses, and gardens...in the Indian Summer lovely weather. And we walked for miles, over the fields, in the lanes' (*Magnificence* Scene 8). In terms of the anti-spectacle, this absence/presence paradox is significant because if they - the audience - could easily picture the presence of 'the English Country Garden' or 'the University boating scene', it was because the spectacle had projected and branded these social images onto the subjects mind. If these same burnt-on images could be projected back onto the empty stage, their presence indicated the spectacle's residual presence in the mind of the consumer of the image. Paradoxically, therefore, the bare-stage strategy marked out the spectator's role as the abstract consumer, not concrete producer, of cultural imagery.

The bare-stage or poor-theatre method, of course, evidences a consolidation of the 'theatre of the anti-spectacle' I identified above. However, there is a subtle difference between the two. As an alternative to revealing the unconcealed artificial theatricality of the images it put upon the stage, by means of the bare-stage the more radical anti-anti-spectacle theatre achieved its role as *Fiktionskritik* by foregrounding the materiality of the theatre *per se*. Stripped of artifice, illusions and objects, the theatre building - its walls, stages, lighting, and curtains - were purposefully placed to the fore of the performance experience. The spectacle-busting logic of this overt materiality was that it displayed a conscious attempt by the dramatist to refuse to produce a fantasy commodity into which the spectator could escape from reality as she/he does with orthodox commodities. On the bare-stage, because the ratio of exposure is biased towards the material situation over the abstract drama, the anti-spectacle over the spectacle, post'68 political theatre alerted the spectator to the fact that they were viewing a fictional and artificial show.

The bare-stage event also sought to strip down and reveal the physical materiality of the actors. For example, to see naked actors playing at being horses, small children, or stubby Jockeys inevitably prepared the audience to respond to them as physical human beings, performing parts, pretending to be whatever the writer's imagination demanded. Stripped-down theatre quite literally brought spectators closer to corporeal, rather than abstract, human

subjectivities. Although audience members watched actors *playing* a part - the spectator inevitably using their imagination to bestow an abstract reality upon the stage picture, even if the actor is playing at being a horse or the Epsom Derby - he/she still experienced the overt presence of physical human beings. More pressingly, in contrast to the inert spectator, performers were actively and playfully playing, taking part in the production of a cultural commodity, not passively consuming it. A particular case in point is *Knuckle's* 'Crumbles' scene. In this sketch, although the abstract locus was broadly maintained - bare-skinned 'characters' cartwheel and perform handstands on a beach - the register was punctured when one actor, standing upon the shoulders of another, stared out into the audience and said she could see 'heavy scowls and fists raised in anger, and I see tears of sorrow and of indignation...I see the living dead...I see men - born Happy. It just doesn't show. Let me down' (*Knuckle Act1/8*). That is, whilst the active actors played with childish unrestrained joy upon the stage, the theatre audience sat inactive, alienated in the 'lonely crowd' of the spectacle Debord was so fond of evoking.²⁵

Finally, the bare-stage, with its poor properties and acting, refused to provide the bourgeois spectator with theatre as commodity. As we have seen, historically the bourgeois theatre, as cultural product, signified, like any other bought artefact, its own status as a high-cultural object *and*, by association, the spectator's connected cultural standing. By contrast, in *Epsom Downs*, *Magnificence*, and *Knuckle* (not to mention *The Education of Skinny Spew* and *Gum and Goo*), actors cavorted around pretending to be animals, exposing their penises and anuses, screaming like spoilt children, swearing and humiliating the spectator. If SI theoretical slogans proclaimed "Consume More and Live Less" or "To Be Rich Today Is To Possess The Greatest Number Of Poor Objects",²⁶ operating homologically the stage sets and scenery of an anti-spectacular theatre struggled to be free of all cultural objects, so denying the consumption of spectacular technological theatre as a cultural commodity.

²⁵ Debord, p. 22. 'The reigning economic system is founded on isolation; at the same time it is a circular process designed to produce isolation. Isolation underpins technology, and technology isolates in its turn; all goods proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system as it strives to reinforce the isolation of the "lonely crowd".'

²⁶ Viénet, p. 73. Knabb, *Situationist Anthology*, p. 92.

Disrupting the Show - Attacking the Spectator

Debord was all too aware of this tendency towards the commodification of culture when he wrote 'A culture now wholly commodity was bound to become the star commodity of the society of the spectacle.'²⁷ If culture can be a commodity, then theatre, like all other commodities, comes not only with a use value, but with an added *symbolic value*. Consumers who attend or 'buy it' as commodity are purchasing cultural difference. In the same way that the diverse brands of alcohol differentiate and stand in for those who consume them in *Epsom Downs*, theatre too can stand in for the subject - differentiating those who consume it from those who consume television; those other brands of aesthetic products known as popular-culture.

Comedians (as theatre), for example, criticised working class culture and, because of the binary logic of difference, discoursed upon the superior liberal culture of its bourgeois audience, and so gave the bourgeois spectator value for its money. The play began as a vicarious tour of working-class culture and, *à la* Sloman, belonged in this mode to the 'spectacles of poverty', albeit cultural poverty, identified in *The Party*. *Comedians* showed the working class attending night-school in a run down secondary modern. The classroom is shabby and bleak. Griffiths depicted working-class audiences as reactionary and ignorant bigots. The performance suggested they consume reactionary, sexist, and racist comedy, not the liberal arts. As Challenor puts it to the would-be comedians:

Don't try to be deep...I'm not looking for philosophers, I'm looking for comics. I'm looking for someone who sees what the people want and knows how to give it them. It's the people pay the bills, remember, yours, mine....We're servants, that's all. They demand, we supply. Any good comedian can lead an audience by the nose. But only in the direction they're going. And that direction is, quite simply...escape.
(*Comedians* Act 1)

This short remark articulated the idea that jokes, gags, comedians, and comedy *per se* are the cultural commodities of the working class. Jokes, like orthodox commodities, have a simple use value. Basically - like alcohol - they produce laughter and its attendant affective feel good factor. But they also have

²⁷ Debord, p. 137.

an added symbolic value in that they are instrumental in discriminating between groups and types, forming social clusters of participation and exclusion. Jokes about ethnic groups, for instance, reinforce the identity of those who are not in the group attacked or ridiculed. As such the argument can be made that the consumers of this commodity - comedy - purchase an escape into the image of identity, even if this is a fantasy. Jokes about the Irish, women, Asians, the disabled, homosexuals, and the working class work to reinforce the real social fields of difference just as a fridge, certain cars, make of handbag or raincoat will do. By the inverted logic of the spectacle, therefore, to not laugh at or patronise these divisive commodities is to claim spectacular cultural value by one's *difference* and indifference to them. Bourgeois liberal culture, far from discoursing upon negative cultural stereotypes as the comedians and jokes do, offers cultural products - books, plays, political tracts, films, poetry etc - which signify and champion enlightenment humanistic values. Again, as a bourgeois commodity, the play, *Comedians*, fulfilled this criterion. The audience could identify with the humanistic liberalism of Eddie Waters, the comedian's teacher, who provides a lecture to the working-class characters about stereotypes and how jokes reinforce cultural hierarchies and social exclusion.

A true joke, a comedians joke, has to do more than release the tension, it has to *liberate* the will and desire, it has to *change the situation* (pause). There's very little won't take a joke. But when a joke bases itself upon a distortion - a 'stereotype' perhaps - and gives the lie to the truth so as to win a laugh and stay in favour, we've moved away from a comic art into the world of 'entertainment'. (*Comedians* Act 1)

However, in the second act the differences between the liberal theatre, television, working-class popular culture and middle-class culture were collapsed when the play *Comedians* metamorphosed into the show the comedians have been rehearsing for. That is to say, the middle-class spectators became the audience the performance aimed at, insofar as the stage became, not the Nottingham Playhouse but, homologous to the theatre turning into a factory in *Occupations*, a working class club, or, in a sense, the real life 1970s TV show *The Comedians*. Of course in this initial abstract register of *the* 'working man's club' complete with club pianist, old time medleys, MC, and the appeal to the audience to patiently accept 'a *brief* interval in the bingo, to listen to some new comics' the performance situated the small-

club stage in a safe other place (*Comedians* Act 2). In this dramatic locale *Comedians* provided the bourgeois audience with one of its favourite spectacles, the dramatisation and depiction of working class culture; they were enjoying a good show, safe in their removed voyeuristic spectatorship. But, that accepted, the audience were only notionally separated from the popular-cultural product by the thin symbolic border left between the stage-front of the material theatre, and that of the abstract club stage. Indeed, in his stage directions Griffiths insisted that this scene should be played as real as possible so that, in effect, the stage and theatre developed into the working-class nightclub. So when two comedians, McBrain and Samuels, suddenly change their act, switching from the familiar model of humanistic culture Eddie Waters attempted to inculcate into the 'uneducated' working class - a culture a bourgeois audience is comfortable with, paying good money to consume (and be seen to consume) - and revert to the comic 'stereotype' of 'the TV comedian', they confronted the bourgeois spectator with a performance built upon *real* racist and sexist humour. For example (with the disappearance of the invisible/non-existent abstract working-class audience), when the actor playing Sammy Samuels, the Bernard-Manning brand of comedian, took a real microphone in hand, and asked the audience

Heard about the Irish lamppost? Pissed on a dog. Hear about the Irish cargo ship carrying yoyos? Sank forty-four times. The Irish waterpolo team. Drowned twelve horses. This secretary runs into the boss's office and says, can I use your dictaphone? he says, No use your finger like everyone else! There's this West Indian tries to get a labouring job on a building site. Foreman says, No chance, I know you lot. I give one of you a job, you turn up next day with a gang of your friends. He begs and pleads and finally gets the job. Next day he turns up with pigmy. (*indicating*) Pigmy. Down there. The foreman said, What did I tell you, no friends! He says, That's not my friend, that's my lunch. (*Comedians* Act 2)

the bourgeois theatre audience was now *the* audience. They became the locus and subject of the play's action - not the abstract or physical working class audience. The racist jokes and comedian's performance, from this point on, were directed towards their social group. Consequently, Griffiths put the individual spectator's reaction to these jokes into the spotlight. Such a reversal

engineered a particularly uncomfortable cultural predicament. Should they laugh?; Can the spectator stop him/herself laughing?; What does one do if you are the only person to laugh?; What is one's reaction if members of one's own conspicuous community of cultural consumers reacts like the fictional abstract working class consumers? What *would* happen is that the spectacle, the spectator's performance, the public show of liberal humanism, would be broken.

Audiences at performances of *Comedians* were therefore threatened by their affective response to proletarian cultural artefacts; their own fears and bigotry possibly exposed. What is more, the bourgeoisie's pretensions to cultural, intellectual, and social difference, which the attendance and consumption of theatre seemed to confirm, could now be exposed as counterfeit and artificial. To laugh entailed becoming a consumer of low culture. The spectator did not have to express amusement at the gags, however, to trigger this cultural reversal. Because, to all intents and purposes, one had still become a spectator and consumer of the TV show *The Comedians*, and, as a result, if the consumption of commodities stands in for the subject, the audience having paid to consume 'popular culture', was made aware of what bourgeois theatre provides for the consumer by its fragile *absence*. *Comedian's* inversion of the theatrical commodity therefore problematised what theatre is/does, in that it questioned if these bigoted stereotypical jokes still counted? For were they not defused and the audience protected by the symbolic capital the frame of the theatre and art as commodity guaranteed? Furthermore, if forms signify, as do all cultural artefacts, could *Comedians* still be theatre if its *image as theatre* has been transformed and broken by its transition into light entertainment or low cultural forms - a TV comedy show, or night at a working man's club? Such questions were for the audience to answer, questions posed to alert and awaken the spectator from the dream world Debord suggested contemplative citizenship engenders. Because, by breaking the invisible fourth wall screen, a symbolic marker which protected the abstract locus from the physical and social world of the spectator, *Comedians* rendered the invisible contract between consumer and commodity, a bond that guarantees spectacular consumption, broken and clearly *visible*.

Having deconstructed working class culture as the minority spectacle it had become, a mere appendage of a universal spectacle, *Comedians* sought to radically disrupt the conventions of bourgeois theatre and spectacular spectatorship, in other ways. As we have seen, the play, in its abstract locus, was set in a tawdry classroom of a 'northern' secondary modern school. The

play appeared to be about the education of mature working class students by a liberal educator. In this mode *Comedians* set itself up as another favourite bourgeois spectacle - the power of education to change working class life - and so resembled comparable cultural artefacts such as these: Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), Richard Hogarth's *Uses of Literacy* (1957), Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1980) or the 'ninety minute' plays Sloman berates. However, the comedian Mick Connor shatters this familiar and comfortable spectacle when, taking the microphone from the stand, he slowly walks down from the abstract stage and sits upon the edge of the stage of the Nottingham Playhouse, facing the audience. To reinforce the drama's transgression of the abstract, the actor addressed the audience directly, 'Wuz yez ever foreigners, any of yez?' and then proceeded to describe to the audience how historically the English have marked their difference from the Irish by stereotyping them as thick troublemakers, and that, like commodities, contemporary national characteristics signified and accrued 'symbolic capital' in a binary relationship to each other. For example, he asks the white middle-class audience 'I mean, what are you lot, eh do you know? You don't have to find out, do you? Just people. You'd have to go to India or ...Africa ...or Ireland to find out...Mmm?'. At the end of the act he warned the audience 'so listen anyway. Don't believe all you hear, you know what I mean. Speak well of the living. Especially within earshot. And the next time you meet an Irishman, count to ten...and ask God to make you a little more inventive' (*Comedians* Act 2).

Whatever its other effects, this lecture by Connor represented a fundamental turning point in *Comedians* because within the space/time of the performance it was the bourgeois class, not the working-class comedians, who were being re-educated. *Comedians* held in real time, like the abstract night-class, developed into a night class for the middle-class spectator. The commodity here, in a sense, talked back by mutating from what it was, a commodity for vicarious satisfaction, to one which critiqued the consumer. What is more, the performance implied that they too had partaken of the 'symbolic violence' differential stereotypes, myths, jokes, and other forms of bigotry cultural artefacts can construct. After all, the show they had been watching and consuming - *Comedians* - had been covertly built upon a social archetype of the working class as social comedians, clowns, and wise-cracking uneducated performers, cultural jokes in themselves. This is why Griffiths' stage directions demanded that Price shaves himself in front of the audience with 'strange clown like timing', whilst others enter the night-class dressed as milkmen or wear

crumpled hired suits under donkey jackets with Wimpey on the back. Also, communication between the working men is always humorous. In one short exemplary scene Price climbs like a naughty schoolboy upon a desktop and recites a limerick comically punctuated by the others.

Price: There was young lady called Pratt...

McBrain: Yes, yes...

Price: who would hang from the light by her hat

Connor: No, no.

Price: With a frightening cough...

Samuels: Yes

Price: She would jerk herself off...

McBrain: Ah...

Price: (*vicious but quiet*) By sinking her teeth in her Twat

All: Ole!

(Comedians Act 1)

At other points in the first act the comics imitate, and make jokes about everyone and everything. The audience, therefore, were getting a 'good show'. The working class 'entertained' the bourgeois spectator and this spectacle as commodity appeared to support their own intellectual and cultural identity by stereotyping the working class as clowns, simple and childish. For in presenting a milkman, a bricklayer, British Rail worker, an insurance salesman, and a Jew, Griffiths provided the audience with cultural subjects commonly the butt of stock-in-trade gags.

The entertaining aspects of the bourgeois spectacle or show, though, were eventually punctured by the performance of Price. Comparable to the bare-stage strategies of other plays, his performance presented the threat of the human subject stripped bare of all signifying artefacts. Unlike other comedians, Price is bereft of all comedy artefacts and cultural signification, no dinner jacket, ruffled shirt, dickey bow or buttonhole flower. Instead, dressed in the 'latest bowver boy' fashion, he epitomized an alternative, more intimidating, working-class stereotype, the football hooligan. Although his face is whitened clown-like, Price's demeanour appeared more deathly and menacing, his manner in conflict with the benign comedians of the preceding scenes. Next, although he initially makes to play the violin - a comforting cultural spectacle of social embourgeoisement - he eventually sets it alight, crushing it underfoot.

Having destroyed this high-cultural artefact, he moves on to perform a complicated martial arts routine, signifying the working classes' fascination with violent Kung-fu culture and films, rather than classical music (*Comedians Act 2*).

The principal import and significance of Price's performance, however, only became slowly and worryingly apparent for the bourgeois audience when a club-hand brought two 'larger-than-life' stuffed dummies onto the stage. Dressed up in dinner jackets and evening dress they represented mocking caricatures of the theatre-going middle-class public and thus confronted the audience with an effigy of itself, and, because effigies are traditional burnt or destroyed to symbolise the hate for the object itself (Price eventually makes the middle-class effigies bleed by sticking a pin in the heart of one of them), the show had been transformed into something other than what they anticipated on entering the theatre space. To reinforce the threatening atmosphere, and alert the spectator to the fact that these effigies symbolised a simulation of the audience, Price slowly turns from the dummies to the audience, smiling 'evil and childlike' (*Comedians Act 2*).

In a recognisable Situationist 'reversal of perspective', then, the bourgeois subject and bourgeois culture had become the play's object of ridicule. The dummies held significance because, as immobile and reified caricatures - objects which cannot talk back - they represented a parallel *objectification* of the middle-class spectator to that which they had just consumed of the working class, as such, the table of the stereotypical drama had turned upon them. Stage directions, for example, prescribed that the dummies characterized a middle-class couple waiting for a cab from the theatre, but when the 'mute' couple ignore Price *Comedians* pointed up the uncomfortable fact that, outside the safe space of the theatre middle-class culture paid no attention to the working class. The intelligentsia's spectacular fascination with working-class culture was busted again with Price's rhetorical and proxy questioning of the dummies, 'been to the match have we?' or 'let's go and have a pint, get to know each other. Here, don't you live in Salford'. The cultural attack continued with 'You're a stuck-up bastard aren't you?'. Finally he tells the dummies, and, in reality the Nottingham audience, that 'you can laugh you know, I don't mind you laughing. I'm *talking* to you...Laugh you buggers, laugh' (*Comedians Act 2*).

The dummies, of course, like the shocked audience, do not laugh (if they could) because his act was *not* funny. Price no longer conformed to a

clown or a benign working class comedic character. His act was purposefully impossible to culturally quantify because, like Brenton's montages, it refused to conform to, or provide the consolation of, a coherent aesthetic form. As cultural artefact it displayed no value because it instigated no cultural prestige as art, comedy, acting, theatre or performance. His performance had no cultural label and as such no spectacular value. Furthermore, it offered no cultural or spectacular value for the bourgeois spectator because its object of ridicule, that which it distinguished/differentiated itself from, was, in fact, the culture of the cultured middle-class consumer. Hence Connor's forewarning to the bourgeois audience that, though they believe that they are somehow 'just people', they will be dealt with later as any other group is; although it took Price's act to render them cultural foreigners, stigmatised, paradoxically, within their own commodified space, the theatre.²⁸

Comedians, then, in all its tricks and twists of form, engineered a night of theatre spent with the working class. But the piece showed drama's cultural interaction with proletarian life to be an artificial, safe, and inauthentic *spectacular* unification of social classes. As Debord put it, the spectacle has the ability to provide the 'image of the working class'²⁹ for the bourgeois class rather than the reality of the working class itself. But *Comedians* busted this spectacle by making its own spectacular social interaction as uncomfortable and confrontational as possible. Far from supporting the 'spectacle of harmony', *Comedians*, like Price's act, rejected its role as social cultural commodity. It talked back to the spectator, finally disrupting his/her liberal fantasises with Price's comment 'National Unity? Up yours Sunshine?' (*Comedians* Act 2).

Learning to Read

Seeking to also disturb the spectator's unproblematic reading strategies of a spectacle-laden theatre, Hare attacked bourgeois culture in what, at first, appears to be a comparable manner. Symptomatic of *Comedians*' transposition of a high-cultural space, theatre, into a popular cultural form, *Knuckle* adopted the literary style of the crime thriller or detective novel. The literary critic J.A.Cuddon describes this genre as:

²⁸ It is not without significance that the singular object of Price's diatribe happened to be the male dummy, and, therefore, the male spectator, because the white-bourgeois-male, in *Comedians*, and the extant social situation, escaped jokes and their attendant stereotyping.

²⁹ Debord, p. 69.

A form of fiction in which a mystery, often a murder, is solved by a detective. The traditional elements are an apparently insoluble crime, uncooperative or dim-witted police, the detective (often an amateur)...the detective's confidant who helps to clarify the problems, a variety of suspects and carefully laid red herrings to put the reader off the scent, a suspect who appears guilty from circumstantial evidence, and a resolution, often startling and unsuspected.³⁰

Strikingly *Knuckle* conformed almost slavishly to Cuddon's descriptive formula. The play featured Curly, a rookie have-a-go detective seeking to solve the murder of a girl, Sarah. Red herrings included a suspicious step-mother - she is shown sorting out the victim's clothes before the girl has been declared dead. First-class rail tickets found in the missing person's belongings point to her father because of his economic and social standing. Chandleresque, Curly's aid, who helps him in his search for the truth, is a woman. The unexpected twist is that the murderess has, in fact, fled to France. The play also echoed filmic or TV adaptations of the genre (and other post-'68 plays which parodied the forms of popular television) in its clichéd imagery. *Knuckle* had smoky bars, subservient barmen, and featured a three-piece cabaret band which provided background noise, replete with gentle applause. Whisky is the detective's drink of choice, and the play revolves around 'broads' and 'tough guys'. The play used music to underscore the visual action, murder suspects are sex-offenders, the insane or social outcasts, whilst Curly speaks the hammy stereotypical internal monologues closely associated with the genre, waxing lyrical about being on the 'Santa Monica freeway stopping over at Sloppy Joes for pastrami on rye' (*Knuckle* Act1/8).

The adaptation/adoption of the detective genre by Hare was not coincidental, or without political import, however. If *Knuckle* positioned itself to arrest the society of the spectacle it seems more than fitting that the playwright selected a cultural artefact which, in its very form and traditions, features a detective whose *modus operandi* is to persistently ask questions; an investigator who digs below 'the random surface' to 'steel grey explanations'. Accordingly, the play is dominated by images of such inquisitive enquiry. In the first act, to give just one illustration, the detective attempts to build up a picture of the signs that might lead him to understand his sister's disappearance.

³⁰J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 229.

Curly: The Shadow of the Moon. Is this still the only club in Guildford?
(He sits at the table.)
Jenny: This is it.
Curly: Did Sarah come here?
Jenny: You know Sarah?
Curly: No I don't. That's the whole point.
Jenny: I hadn't seen her for twelve years.
Curly: Was she friendly with men?
Jenny: In a way. She went for a particular kind...
(Knuckle Scene 1)

Initially as an opening sketch, the meeting between Curly and Jenny had an aesthetic function in that it involved the reader in the abstract world of the play. *Knuckle* was inviting spectators to become their own detectives. Becoming caught up in solving the murder would entail close attention to the plot of the play, so encouraging the spectator to apply their own logic to solving or piecing together signs of evidence put before them - a standard practice demanded of the 'reader' of detective fiction. As Cuddon points out the idea of the genre 'was to present a mystery to be solved, and the reader was "invited" to make use of the clues in order to reach a solution'. Detective novels, therefore, are not simply a form of pulp-culture, but 'a kind of intellectual exercise which could prove a challenge to the reader'.³¹ Through its association with detective fiction, *Knuckle*, as a cultural artefact, delivered more value for money than most other cultural commodities. We can also say that, by providing an aesthetic form which demanded participation, rather than passive consumption, Hare's play was intellectually and culturally *inclusive*. In short the commodity, the play *Knuckle*, had a *use* value. It demanded that the spectator exercise its own reason, ingenuity, intellect, and imagination to solve the crime.

What Hare's application of this form of detective fiction really demonstrated though, as do all of the plays I have selected here, is the essential requirement that the spectator of the contemporary society of the spectacle ask more questions, read more cultural signs, in the everyday situation outside the theatre. For example *Knuckle* was about the fictional disappearance of a fictional character, but it also talked about the corruption,

³¹ Cuddon, p.232.

deceit, and exploitation of the social scene by unscrupulous capitalists, money lenders, city banks and bureaucratic institutions. The late 60s early 70s were periods during which 'Rachmanism' - the buying up of large swathes of property and charging extortionate rents (*Magnificence* tackled the same topic) - had become socially prevalent. *Knuckle* differed from the genuine detective story, then, in that it demanded that the passive spectators who populate the spectacle get behind the appearance and images of the *everyday*, discovering the logic which drives it. Rather than adopt a passive consciousness they must develop a critical one; become competent readers of the signs they are daily confronted with in the public performance that is the spectacle. In opposition to the bourgeois beliefs of Patrick that 'everyone's entitled to their own illusions', *Knuckle* advocated that 'everyone should know everything' (*Knuckle* Act 1/2). Hare's thoroughgoing attitude to spectacle-busting, the author's contradictory stance to the abstract spectacle, was homological - in the 'thinking in common' sense of the term - to the critical semiotic proficiency the French and American semioticians Roland Barthes and Charles Morris demanded in their post-'68 works *Mythologies* (1968) and *Writings on the General Theory of Signs* (1970). They argued that a proper understanding of signs will make for a healthier, better educated 'demystified' society.

...a truly democratic society would aim, as a matter of principle, to enlarge and diversify the sign capacities and resources of its members...Only in such a society would semiotics be given a basic place in the educational process, so that the individual would be prepared to resist the exploitation of himself by other users of signs, to avoid pathic signs in his behaviour, and to make his contribution to the constant correction and creation of signs upon which a healthy society depends.³²

If Hare's audience could be coached into interpreting his detective story then they could also be instructed to read the signs of the ongoing social situation. As we have seen the topsy-turvy logic of the spectacle argues that all that is good will appear and all that is bad will disappear, whereas critics of the spectacle argue that all that is bad will appear and all that is good will disappear. Correspondingly, in its own interpretative semiotic proficiency

³² Charles Morris, in John Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 2nd edn (London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 94. See also his useful bibliography, pp.177-188 for a selection of other Structuralist texts.

Knuckle reversed the perspective of the spectacle by contending that, when a high-rise block appeared, this was not because it was needed as a commodity, desirable, an answer to the consumer's dreams and fantasies, but the result of a cold commercial logic.

Hare's use of the detective genre is also noteworthy in that critics of the society of the spectacle theorised that commodities provide the consumer with vicarious or compensatory stories or fictions. For example, detective fiction and films support the spectacle because, as spectacular commodities, they tell us that the cop always gets his man, crime doesn't pay - they stand in for a vicarious and compensatory sense of justice and well being. The satisfaction they deliver is not only that crime doesn't pay but that this *is* a crime, be it murder, rape, or a bank robbery. Crime genres present a certain contained *image of crime*. In consuming these fantasies the consumer of crime fiction can fantasise that the world is safe, crime is elsewhere and contained by fictional, and real, detectives. Whereas in reality, as an extract from Larry Law's *Spectacular Times* puts it, 'Television's not the truth!... We lie like hell. We'll tell you that Kojak always gets the killer, and... no matter what trouble the hero is in, don't worry, just look at your watch... at the end of the hour he's going to win. We'll tell you any shit you want to hear.'³³ Contradictorily, *Knuckle* alleged that, whilst the consumer consumes these fictional stories and artefacts, real crime (public and bureaucratic corruption) remained unpunished and hidden. The play pointed out that TV culture is often no more than 'technological valium', the TV programming simply programmes the spectator into accepting the images and fictions it produces.

In mounting a recognisable assault upon TV we can speak of *Knuckle's* cultural, as well as social, comment.³⁴ Suggesting that *Knuckle* provided contemporary socio-cultural commentary, however, offers something of a paradox because, like *Comedians*, it deployed a low cultural 'popular form' to make serious political points. Yet there is a strong anti-spectacle logic in this unlikely alliance. Apart from the common gesture of undermining the theatrical spectacle as cultural capital, the play *Knuckle* set about educating the spectator to read low-cultural signs, such as detective fiction, with a more discerning eye.

³³ Law, *The Media*, p. 7.

³⁴ Cuddon, p.234. Interestingly this hybridisation of a low-popular form with social and political comment, a sort of detective political theatre, is not particularly iconoclastic for the genre itself. Since the 1950s many detective writers have developed and modified their work to include more stress upon concrete social comment. That is, this cultural artefact is not simply consumed for its vicarious thrills and pure entertainment value but it has a *use value*. Similarly we can say that *Knuckle*, and all forms of political theatre, avoided simple commodification and easy consumption, though perhaps not *recuperation*.

As Hare has pointed out, there is a residual snobbery around the thriller, and popular-culture *per se*, as such he 'sought to 'subvert the form of the thriller to serious ends'.³⁵ Antagonistically, Hare's play, disguised as a crime thriller, therefore attacked the very bourgeois culture which differentiated itself from the culture of the masses. Put more succinctly, *Knuckle* made its own aesthetic form as a cultural sign problematic and contradictory. For the audience to have taken the play on its visual signifiers alone would have been to miss the political import of the play. By conforming to Debord's dialectical aesthetic - the language of contradiction - *Knuckle* contradicted bourgeois culture, tripped it up over its own pretensions and bigotry, offering the audience a cultural commodity which contradicted normal assumptions about Detective fiction's - and popular culture's - use value.

In *Comedians* a lost Asian student wanders into the comedian's class looking for a 'Learning to Read Class' to which Waters points out the title of the class is 'Reading to Learn' a class in 'literary appreciation' (*Comedians* Act 1). A funny joke; perhaps. But the joke was on the audience because it was they who were sat in a night class, and needed to be educated, not about literary appreciation, but to read cultural signs like jokes, commodities, culture, fashion, theatre, revolutionary activity, political and popular imagery - and the play itself - with more semiotic proficiency. The ambition of a political theatre against the spectacle was that theatre audiences, like every other spectator of the spectacle, should become active *Fiktionskritiks*, for, as Debord maintained, in a visual culture the sight is the most easily deceived of the senses.³⁶

³⁵ David Hare, *The History Plays*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p.10.

³⁶ Debord, p. 17.

Workers' Playtime: Conclusion

This thesis begins and ends with an epigraph from the semiotician Charles Morris. In this extract he argues that an empowered community would be one which strenuously sought to 'enlarge and diversify the sign capacities' of its membership. Transferring his theory to the academic field of study, this piece of work has taken the opportunity to contribute to the collective understanding of dramatic cultural theory by examining the clusters of significant signs which connect post-'68 political theatre to Paris May'68. The thesis accepted the 'received knowledge' that political theatre was reenergized by the French *événements*, whilst realising that a more comprehensive analysis of this fact had yet to be achieved.

Consequently, research was underpinned by two key May'68 Situationist texts: Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Having provided a synopsis of the unified themes these books articulated - they advocated a reversal of perspective on madness; the rejection of work; the importance of physical Occupation; a critique of left and right-wing politics; the pursuit of a Reichian sexual revolution; a radical critique of bourgeois culture; the artificiality of the 'spectacle' - the thesis then mapped out how these logics informed the specific revolutionary form and content of Paris May'68.

The thesis then drew theoretical and material parallels between how the French situation was interpreted in Britain, and replicated by the political products and radical activities of the British counter-culture. This was done to form a theoretical cultural homology between the continental patterns of struggle which both directly and indirectly influenced post-'68 British political theatre. In this way the thesis sought to avoid any unsubstantiated vulgar correlation between the primary writings of the SI and the dramatic output of political playwrights and theatre workers. Instead, the thesis wrote of a dispersed Situationist *logic* or philosophical 'thinking in common', whilst using SI theory to 'write back' to post-'68 theatre workers.

The 'Introduction' thus sketched out the historical, social, and political landscape to which the clusters of ideas, themes, and aesthetics of post-'68 political theatre were a positive homological reaction to and a homological continuation of. Chapter 1 'Anti-Oedipus', for example, traced the theoretical connection between Vaneigem's rejection of madness as an existential objective category, whilst developing his critique of socio-cultural identification

through an Anti-Psychiatry paradigm, to analyse the symptoms of aesthetic madness we see in what I call 'anti-oedipal theatre'. Chapter 2 'Occupations' looked at how Sorel influenced the SI, who informed the British scene, which structured post-'68 political theatre's positive attitude to the ethos and logic of Workers' Councils, in turn informing the attendant act of seizing bourgeois theatre as a dynamic space for the wider occupationist struggle. 'Sexuality', Chapter 3, showed how Situationist theory is present in post-'68 drama, by critiquing its formal articulations via a direct comparative reading of Wilhelm Reich's theory of 'Orgasmothérapie' - the thesis ultimately postulated the emergence of a concomitant recognisable 'orgasmotheatre'. Chapter 4 'Culture' demonstrated how post-'68 political theatre, in homological accord with the SI's call to move class conflict onto the terrain of culture from the economic, used proletarian pop music to lead its own 'assault on culture'. Finally, Chapter 5, 'The Society of the Spectacle', directly used Debord's critique of consumer society to isolate the clusters and structures of drama which directly reflect the thesis put forward in his influential book *The Society of the Spectacle* and other extended writings.

Throughout, the work also put the formal gestures and radical content of post-'68 political theatre to the same critical evaluation as it put bourgeois society. Each chapter inserted the caveat that the political theatre worker, Situationist playwright, and pro-'68 counter-cultural spectator is a suitable case for any applied SI critique. The thesis argued that the adoption of the schizoid logic, political radicalism, sexual revolution, the assault upon culture, and revolutionary posturing can be reconfigured as political spectacles; merely abstract symbolic protests rather than concrete material forms of socialist revolution. The thesis also tentatively suggested that, by moving away from big 'P' politics to the micro politics of radical subjectivity, the seeds were already sown for political failure, such that, between 1968-1978 the divergent, though homogenised, socialist targets of post-'68 political theatre collapsed, just as they did during Paris May'68. There was to be no British revolution and no 'Workers' Playtime'. The only workers playing were those theatre workers playing at being revolutionary, whilst, paradoxically, their essential individualism of 'do what you will is the only rule' let in - as the French did when they voted for De Gaulle - a right-wing government led by Margaret Thatcher, whose ideological pursuit of individualism came out of both the failures and successes of May'68.

With this paradox in mind it should fall to someone to analyse the fall of politicised socialist drama, with the parallel rise of plays and performances which take pure subjectivity as their only object of analysis over the following decade. The task of any consequent research project should be to chart the social development and influence of May'68 on non-political or post-modern theatre between 1978-1988.

Workers' Playtime: Glossary

Commodities: For the Situationists, the term commodity encompassed any product, designed and produced by capitalist society, which could be sold to, and consumed by, the social whole. A washing machine or car qualified as a commodity, along with clothes, records, and designer furniture. But other more abstract objects could be commodified, too. Holidays, opera, film, theatre, even writings lifted from texts or socio-political speeches, were commodities; radical discourse sold or bought as possession. Modern commodities not only possess a positive use value (the mechanical or abstract task they were designed for), but come with the promise that ownership of these goods will embellish the image or status of the consumer. Paradoxically, though, prestigious commodities, and the advertising propaganda which sells them, also create *negative spectacular hierarchies* which separate human beings and social classes into competing fields of consumption. The most explicit Situationist critique of this new phenomenon of a social structure mapped out by commodity relations can be found in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). May'68 graffiti provides further evidence of the book's critical approach to consumer society when radicals spray-painted the Debordian slogan "*Consommez Plus Vous Vivre Moins*" ("Consume More And Live Less") on Paris buildings.

Critical Vandalism: After occupying the buildings of the Sorbonne, Paris, *enragés* defaced the university by scribbling Situationist propaganda all over its walls. They also vandalised many of the paintings hung there. For example, the SI's dual assault on bureaucratic communism and western free-market capitalism was expressed by scribbling "Humanity Will Only Be Happy The Day The Last Bureaucrat is Hung With The Guts Of The Last Capitalist" across a portrait of revered figures from French intellectual life. Situationists called this form of agitation 'critical vandalism'. It was 'critical' in that, following Marx's call for a radical 'critical philosophy', it actively critiqued the contemporary political and social scene in its content. It was also 'critical' in that, by attacking the established bourgeois state in graffiti, rather than the philosophical literature of those in the spoilt artwork, vandalism became critical (important) as a means of valid revolutionary communication in its own right. Hence critical vandalism. The SI argued that the widespread use of political graffiti during May'68 ushered in a form of agitation that enjoyed a far-reaching success, and became one of the original characteristics of the period of occupations.

Dérive: To *dérive*, or drift, was to notice the way in which certain areas, districts, streets, buildings, parks, and commercial centres impacted upon the self and altered emotional states of mind. For instance, churches, the SI said, were purposefully designed to evoke fear of authority. Furthermore, bureaucratic town planners mapped out how we travel through space and time - and thus life - because pavements and roads form disciplinary lines of travel along which one must move in prescriptive ways. By introducing streetlights, heating, and air conditioning rational technological society had banished the irrational dreamscapes of darkness and obscurity, destroying the distinctive psychic charm of winter and summer, daybreak, or the ambience of nightfall. In response to this dehumanised environment the Situationist Ivan Chtcheglov called for the creation of new experimental mobile cities. In his pamphlet 'Formulary For A New Urbanism' he suggested citizens should live in a newly designed 'Bizarre Quarter', a 'Happy Quarter', or 'Sinister Quarter'. One might also design mobile homes which could be periodically transported within these changing 'disorientating', though pleasurable, environments. (see Play, Psychogeography, and Situation)

Détournement: In their publication 'Methods of *Détournement*' (1956) the SI wrote that 'the literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes...Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations...The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original

elements and produces a synthetic organisation of greater efficacy'.¹ This was their definition of *détournement*. Perhaps the most well known act of *détournement* was the SI's use of comic strips. By adding speech bubbles containing radical Situationist theory (cartoons were often pasted over with excerpts from Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* or Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*) these 'critical' comic strips clearly communicated the politics of the OM (they denounced trade-union reformism, or bourgeois capitalism) in their intellectual literary utterances. But by juxtaposing radical philosophy with the low aesthetics of the newspaper comic-strip, and so integrating the two diverse elements, this new superior construction comically debunked - *devalued* - the seriousness of reasonable 'real' 'rational' literate forms advocated by political orthodoxy, without throwing the serious political baby out with the old revolutionary bath water.

Enragé: Essentially anarchist, the most important thing to say about the *enragés* is that, in contrast to passive political organisations, they favoured agitation and direct action over the slow reformism of the extant student union, parliamentary trade-union leaders, and bureaucratic Communist parties. Well versed in Situationist theory, *enragés* instigated a fresh non-dogmatic - though destructive - approach to Marxist revolutionary theory; a political philosophy which stoked-up the widespread factory occupations that traversed the whole of France during 1968. Denounced by those on the traditional left for shunning the cult of political leadership, committees, and traditional parties, these self-styled autonomous activists developed revolutionary forms of struggle which confronted state power, not through protracted debate or academic texts, but real physical violence, epitomised in the street-battles and barricades of May 10th.

Everyday Life: In contrast to orthodox left wing politics, SI theoreticians argued that the socialists critical of bourgeois capitalist society could not fight it on the economic terrain alone, but must formulate a new radical philosophy which scrutinised all aspects of *everyday life*. The SI's change of perspective came about because, rejecting the claims of both capitalism and communism to have delivered personal happiness through technological advancement, seen through Situationist eyes, everyday life had been reduced to moments of overwhelming isolation, humiliation, boredom, and personal sacrifice. From the everyday demands of production and its allied consumption; misguided approaches to insanity; surrender to the cult of television; the alienation of work; the banality of recreational forms of entertainment such as art, theatre, pop music or cinema, all were found wanting by the SI. Consequently, Situationists rescheduled revolutionary critical thought to encompass all aspects of everyday life. Hence the anglicised title of Raoul Vaneigem's 1967 book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. (see *The World of Survival*)

Occupations Movement (OM): In defiance of the authority of the prevailing trade unions, leftist intellectuals, and western Communist parties, the *Occupation Movement (OM)* called for the occupation of all previously controlled public and private space which, once retaken, should be put to revolutionary ends. On a very simple level, pasting up a wall-poster, printed on a printing machine reclaimed from the university, constituted a radical act of libertarian occupation. More fundamentally, the call to occupation entailed the seizure of universities, factories, the street, and, crucially, even theatre auditoriums. After the publication of the 'Strasbourg Pamphlet', for instance (a tract which criticised the repressed sexual lives of the student population), students occupied the women only sleeping quarters, a radical act which led to 'the battle of the dormitories'. Later, during the high period of occupations, OM activists took control of the Odeon Theatre in Paris. Wrested from bourgeois control, the space was opened up and put to use in the wider proletarian struggle. The OM

¹ Knabb, Ken, ed, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), pp. 45-56.

reached an international scale with copycat occupations in Berlin, London, Tokyo, Rome, and Berkeley.

Modification: Coined by the Danish Situationist painter Asger Jorn, *Modification* entailed the salvaging of existent genres of art into new hybrid combinations. In his painting *Paris By Night* (1959) a *modification* was made because Jorn saved a piece of obsolete art from a junk shop - in this case a romantic lone figure gazing into the Paris night - rather than paint a new painting. In the style of Jackson Pollock, Jorn then added expressionistic modern patterns, and so made the gesture of transforming the received dead-art of bourgeois naturalistic painting into something newly original through the input it received from the avant-garde artist. In aesthetic terms, *modifications* signalled the need to subvert or change aesthetic genres, like art. As with all Situationist gestures, the broader challenge was to the radicalised citizen. By defacing or salvaging the painting, Jorn gestured to a wider destruction or reclamation of all existent spheres of everyday life, from education to politics, art to theatre. If a *passé* art – classic portrait painting, say – can be re-valued through repossession, not only is art's essential potential as a carrier of revolutionary meaning implicated, but any field of human activity can be liberated, modified, and changed, into a new shape. (see *Détournement*)

Play: It is in Vaneigem's oeuvre that the Situationist's belief that play could contribute a new dimension to the revolutionary struggle can be substantiated most forcefully. The underlying premise of *The Revolution of Everyday Life* was that, within post-industrial technological social systems, communism and capitalism had increased their emphasis on production or consumption, respectively. Work remained the focus of human existence, unseating the intensification of human playtime the Situationists argued the goal of electrification and engineering should have been. Play was crucial to the SI because it confronted both systems by being *against* work. Slogans painted during the *événements* proscribed 'Never Work'. Play or playfulness was also vital to May'68 for, unlike work, it was creative, too. Creativity was good because the SI made a homological connection between the ingenuity we see underpinning the imaginative work of art or poetry, and the freeform design needed for the newly constructed society.

Psychogeography: Connected to the *dérive*, the term psychogeography encapsulated the psychic effects a drifting exploration of different environmental phenomena might have on those who *dérive*. In particular, the SI were interested in disorientating the human mind with alternative heterogeneous atmospheres. Resembling the act of occupation, psychogeography encouraged participants to cross physical boundaries into alien socio-economic neighbourhoods or cultural customs. Psychogeography was politically important because it embodied the Situationist's plan to engender a certain social morphology or physical spatial solidarity. Psychogeography was also concerned with psychic 'border crossings', especially those transgressions which forced the bourgeois subject to forge innovative psychic communities by travelling into alien proletarian fields of emotional experience, be they architectural, economic, or cultural.

Radical Gesture: The SI argued that, in contrast to the almost entirely theoretical politics of pre-'68 revolutionary activity, the language of contradiction must be dialectical in its formal articulation. The prevalent use of political graffiti during May'68 is an excellent example of a radical gesture because it contradicted the value and authority of bourgeois property, not simply through its content, but through its destructive gestures of vandalism *against* that property. More broadly, a radical gesture could be any activity which moved beyond passive political discourse and converted that theory into physical *action*. The act of occupation embodied a radical gesture because, going further than merely talking about seizing the means of production, whether economic or intellectual, the OM put abstract Marxist theory into concrete revolutionary action. (see Sadie Plant's book, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1997))

Reversal of Perspective: Intertwined within the general SI command to critique all aspects of everyday life, came a plea to the radical subject to perform what Vaneigem called 'reversals of perspective'. In a reversal of perspective, an everyday theme or human objective - which had become secondary to political or revolutionary theory - would be reinstated as a revolutionary priority. Play would be put before work, rather than work prioritised over play, to give just one example. The SI's confrontation with the bourgeois state on cultural or/and sexual issues, rather than economic, offer two other exemplary reversals of perspective. Insisting that madness be considered a mark of healthy subjectivity - whilst insisting that those society considers to be sane are pathologically disturbed - is another key inversion of pre-Situationist socio-political orthodoxy.

Recuperation: Put under the microscope of a comprehensive Situationist interrogation, even revolutionary activity became acknowledged as a potential commodity. For example, during the late 1960s, we begin to see Che-Guevara T-shirts and posters depicting the Argentinian socialist dead in the Bolivian jungle, being sold to modish revolutionary activists. But for the SI, these products were simply being re-sold back as spectacles of revolution, appealing only to 'false revolutionaries'. Revolutionary images therefore became counterrevolutionary or *recuperated*. Owning revolutionary goods was identified as being no more threatening to the *status quo* than buying a packet of soap powder or a television set. *Recuperation*, then, described the way capitalism neutralised many aspects of political dissent by trading in the very discourses that should, in theory, have undermined it. In other, less explicit, examples of *recuperation*, the Situationists realised that words like power, revolution, and liberation were being 'recaptured' to sell non-political commodities. The SI cited an advertisement for keg beer in which Watneys brewery aligned its 'red' barrel with the period's 'radical chic'. Vaneigem argued that, if a consumer society could sell beer under the slogan 'The Red Revolution is Coming', it was inevitable that radical impulses lifted from a strong leftist tradition were always going to be *recuperated*. (see *Commodities and Society of the Spectacle*)

Situation: A Situationist situation can only be understood through a brief exposition of the philosophical school the SI opposed for its passive pessimism. In vogue before the *événements*, existentialism broadly argued that, far from being able to modify our personal situation, humans, more often than not, seem unable to change themselves or their social environment. They are never free to escape the constraints of class, nation, or family. Even conquering the most insignificant habit, or satisfying personal appetite, can be beyond our grasp. By contrast, positive Situationists argued that the word 'Situationist' denoted an activity that aims at making situations as opposed to passively recognising them in academic or other separate terms. A situation, then, was any activity which sought to change a social, cultural, or political given. From crafting new urban environments, to occupying the Odeon theatre, building barricades or fighting police with paving stones, each was a Situationist situation.

Situationist: Strictly speaking the SI denied that Situationists or Situationism existed. The group stated that to label their movement or ideologues Situationists would be to fail to understand the movement's essential non-negotiable anti-specialist philosophy. To begin with, the idea of a Situation-ism as a political or aesthetic movement, like Marx-ism or Futur-ism, proposed a certain leadership with a fixed and recognisable theoretical doctrine. Leadership was incompatible with the SI because their dogged anti-authoritarianism organised them against the 'star system' associated with all isms, whilst, at the same time, made them against leaders or groups formulating prescriptive ideologies for others to blindly follow. Also, because Marxism and Futurism were 'specialisations', one is predominantly political, the other aesthetic, the SI refused to bind-up Situationism within any singular classification. At ease with anarchism, cultural criticism, or town planning, the SI strived to engineer a non-specialist classless phenomenon. That said, during the *événements* these anti-elitist

gestures became recognisable as Situationist tropes, practiced by Situationists. (see Unified Practice, Everyday Life and Workers Councils)

Situationist International (SI): The Situationist International (SI) only emerged as a distinct organisation in 1957. Inspired by Debord's 'Report on the Construction of Situations' (the first recognisable theoretisation of the spectacle and situation) a disparate group of Scandinavian, British, Italian, and German artists decided to leave the avant-garde *L'Internationale Lettriste*, and form the *L'Internationale Situationiste*. The early years of the SI were dominated by the desire to broaden its international scope which its members hoped to achieve by producing the periodic journal, *Internationale Situationiste*. In these texts - famous for their shiny metallic covers - the SI published their ideas on psychogeography, anti-art theory, workers' councils, new forms of political and cultural leadership, as well as kick-starting a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the anarchist and communist tradition. Later, influenced by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre's magazine *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the movement began its critique of the poverty of everyday life experienced in both capitalism and communism, moving eventually on to attack consumerism and the commodification of interpersonal relations. The political influence of the SI reached new heights with the publication of *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) and *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

Society of the Spectacle: In their concept of 'the society of the spectacle' (a theory built upon Marx's theory of 'commodity fetishism'), the SI noted that, in late capitalism, workers were no longer alienated or exploited at the point of production (the workplace), but at the point of consumption (the market). Situationists argued that commodities had a *negative* effect because they divided proletarian subjects through the visual differentials expressed in the goods they owned. Furthermore, the SI saw that a critique of the society of the spectacle had to move beyond attacking ownership of manufactured goods, and be about how every aspect of modern life can be, and was being, commodified. From culture to politics, fashion to theatre, gardening to revolution, each, the Situationists said, conferred a particular 'spectacular' lifestyle or commanding image upon those who consume them. This meant that radical subjects no longer acted tough or political but bought into abstract artefacts which appeared to make them seem hard, glamorous, artistic, intellectual, even revolutionary. For Debord, the society of the spectacle corresponded with the historical moment at which the commodity completed its colonisation of social life.

Unified Theory: Despite their refutation of a narrow-minded economism, the SI were about bringing a unified and classless society to fruition. However, their society-without-classes would be one wherein classlessness was unconfined to a destruction of the hierarchies which structured modern industrial production. Rather, their utopian classlessness would stretch to the reorganisation and unification of elitisms which *disunited* the social structure. The SI were saying that all forms or classifications of human practice should be abandoned. The artificial divisions between art and life, artist and worker, work and life, politics and art, intellectuals and proletariats, universities and the social sphere, for example, had to be ended in a singular unified theory. In the act of critical vandalism, for instance, proletarian graffiti was lifted to the realm of politics, philosophy, or art, whilst art, politics, and philosophy became *declassified* as a separate and superior articulation of political meaning-making or cultural practice and unified within everyday life. Unified theory was not limited to the realm of culture or art, but entailed organising critical attacks against all classificatory aspects of modern civilization: town planning, architecture, education, sociology, psychiatry, cinema, and theatre.

Unified Practice: Related to unified theory, which aimed to re-connect theory with everyday life, this same theory had to be reconnected or unified with practice. For instance, Marxist theory, it was argued, had become intellectually divided from revolutionary practice; contemporary revolutionary discourse it was said simply 'theorises' about the necessity of seizing the means of production - whether intellectual, industrial, or aesthetic. In the confiscation of university halls, factories,

and theatre spaces, however, the OM unified its own theoretical writing with a more potent *practice*. Unified practice, therefore, is the type of radical gesture we see in the practical act of occupation. (see Radical Gesture)

Workers' Councils: The political philosophy of workers' councils, a movement built upon the demands of personal and economic autonomy, formed the backbone of the logic which underpinned a broad sweep of May'68 activity. This is why during the *événements* posters called for the widespread formation of workers' councils. What made these councils so radical was that, in contrast to the hierarchical proletarian organisations which divided-off workers from their leaders - personified in May'68 by the demonised elitist French communist party and trade-union movement - workers' councils, or 'soviets', were run entirely by, and for, the workers. And because self-management was a central theme of Situationism, by encouraging workers, whether students, artists, theatre workers (even football players) to form workers' councils, human beings were being encouraged to re-take control over the time and space of their work-world and personal lives. It was the re-formation of the original Russian-style soviets during May'68 that explains the Situationist' claim that May '68 marked the 'return of the proletariat revolution'.

World of Survival: Modernity, having overcome the malign world of nature, created the benign world-of-survival, a new more healthy environment in which all human physical needs such as food, shelter, and health care had been physically met. The next goal of technological societies, whether those of the communist East or capitalist West, should have been the foundation of social utopias, communities characterised by leisure, pleasure, and fun. In SI parlance, however, the 'world of survival' grew to be a phrase loaded with cynicism and disillusionment. When the SI said modern society realised the 'world of survival', they meant that all one does is survive.

Epigraph, End Notes

Workers' Playtime: Introduction

1) Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958 -1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 584.

Chapter 1: Anti-Oedipal Theatre

- 1) Ratgeb, *Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle* (London: Elephant Editions, 1990), p. 20.
- 2) Ronald D. Laing, *The Politics of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 95.
- 3) Howard Brenton, *Brenton: Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1986), p. xii.
- 4) Rolando Perez, *On Anarchy and Schizoanalysis* (New York: Autonomedia, 1990), p. 19.

Chapter 2: Political Theatre and The Occupations Movement

- 1) Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 110.
- 2) Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), p.67.
- 3) René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* (New York: Autonomedia/Rebel Press, 1992), p.84.

Chapter 3: Sexuality

- 1) Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (London: Vision Press, 1970), p. 195.
- 2) Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), p. 248.
- 3) "Everyone is a Prostitute, selling themselves for money". *Nobody's Scared, The Subway Sect.* Motion Records, 1999.
- 4) "When I Think of Revolution I Want To Make Love". Paris May'68 Graffiti

Chapter 4: Culture

- 1) John McGrath, *Yobbo Nowt* (London: Pluto Plays, 1978), p. 50.
Situationist International Anthology (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), p.143.
- 2) Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991), p.1.

Chapter 5: The Society of the Spectacle

- 1) Knabb, Ken, ed, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), p. 148.
- 2) Larry Law. *Spectacular Times: Bigger Cages Longer Chains #14.*
- 3) Larry Law, *Spectacular Times: Images and Everyday Life #1&2.*

Bibliography:

- Ali, Tariq, *1968 and After* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1978)
Ali, Tariq, *Street Fighting Years* (London: Collins, 1987)
Althusser, Louis, *Essays on Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1993)
Althusser, Louis, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1996)
Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: NLB, 1977)
Anson, Peter, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975)
Anthony, P.D., *The Ideology of Work* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977)
Artaud, Antonin, *The Theatre and its Double* (London: Calder, 1989)
Aston, Elaine, and Savona, George, *Theatre As A Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1981)
Barker, Howard, *Collected Plays Volume 1* (London: Calder, 1990)
Barnes, Mary and Berke, Joseph, *Mary Barnes: Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973)
Barthes, Roland, *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977)
Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies* (St Albans: Palladin, 1976)
Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983)
Bauman, Zygmunt, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994)
Baxandall, Lee, 'The Revolutionary Moment', *The Drama Review*, Vol 13, Winter, (1968)
Baxendale, Leo, *On Comedy: The Beano and Ideology* (Stroud: Reaper Books, 1989)
Billington, Michael, 'London Avant Garde: Who, What, Where', *Plays and Players*, Vol 17, No 9, (1970)
Bolas, Christopher, *Being A Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1994)
Boon, Richard, *Brenton The Playwright*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1991)
Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2000)
Bourdieu, Pierre, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994)
Bourdieu, Pierre, *On Television and Journalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1998)
Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field Of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)
Bowie, Malcolm, *Fontana Modern Masters: Lacan* (London: Fontana Press, 1991)
Boyers, R. & Orrill, R. eds, *Laing and Anti-Psychiatry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)
Brenton, Howard, *Plays for the Poor Theatre* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980)
Brenton, Howard, *Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1986)
Brenton, Howard, *Hitler Dances* (London, Methuen, 1982)
Bull, John, *New British Political Dramatists* (London: Macmillan, 1984)
Camus, Albert, *The Rebel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971)
Cate, David, *The Demonstration* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970)
Cave, Richard Allen, *New British Drama In Performance On The London Stage 1970 -1985* (Gerards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1989)
Cohn-Bendit, Daniel, *Obsolete Communism: The Left Wing Alternative* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)
Connor, Steven, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)
Cooper, David, *The Death of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980)
Counsell, Colin and Wolf, Laurie, eds, *Performance Analysis: an introductory course book* (London: Routledge, 2001)

- Counsell, Colin, *Signs of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Craig, Sandy, ed, *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain* (Ambergate: Amber Lane Press, 1980)
- Crow, Thomas, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent 1955-69* (Everyman: London, 1996)
- Cuddon, J. A., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)
- Culler, Jonathan, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995)
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1996)
- Dupuis, J-F (Raoul Vaneigem), *A Cavalier History Of Surrealism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Eco, Umberto, *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Minerva, 1995)
- Edgar, David, *Edgar: Shorts* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989)
- Edgar, David, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1994)
- Edgar, David, *Plays: 3* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991)
- Edgar, David, 'Ten Years Of Political Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 32 (1978)
- Edgar, David, 'Towards a Theatre of Dynamic Ambiguities', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 33 (1979)
- Engels, Frederick & Marx, Karl, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985)
- Engels, Frederick & Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1994)
- Farren, Mick, *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette* (London: Pimlico, 2002)
- Figes, Orlando, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Pimlico, 1996)
- Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilisation: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Freud, Sigmund, *Freud: Civilisation, Society and Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991)
- Friedenberg, Edgar Z, *Laing* (London: Fontana Collins, 1975)
- Gleason, Ralph, 'The Greater Sound', *TDR*, Vol 13, Summer, (1969)
- Goodman, Paul, *Growing Up Absurd* (London: Sphere Books, 1970)
- Gorney, Howard, and MacColl, Ewan, eds, *Agit-Prop to Theatre Workshop: Political Playscripts, 1930-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986)
- Green, Jonathan, ed, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Pimlico, 1998)
- Griffiths, Trevor, *Trevor Griffiths: Plays 1* (London: faber and faber, 1996)
- Gross, Richard D, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993)
- Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978)
- Guy, Vincent, 'Come Together', *Plays and Players*, Vol 18, No 3, (1970)
- Hare, David, *The Early Plays* (Boston: faber and faber, 1992)
- Hare, David, *The History Plays* (Boston: faber and faber, 1984)
- Hauptman, Gerhart, *The Weavers*, trans. by Frank Marcus (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980)
- Hobsbawn, Eric, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 -1991* (London: Abacus, 2001)
- Home, Stewart, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991)
- Home, Stewart, ed, *What is Situationism? A Reader* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996)

- Itzin, Catherine, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Methuen, 1980)
- Keeffe, Barry, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001)
- Kenny, Michael, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995)
- Kaufmann, Walter, ed and trans. *The Portable Nietzsche* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976)
- Kershaw, Baz, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Kershaw, Baz, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999)
- Klossowski, Pierre, *Sade My Neighbour* (London: Quartet Books, 1992)
- Knabb, Ken, ed, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995)
- Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996)
- Lacan, Jaques, *Ecrits: A Selection*, (London: Routledge, 1993)
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994)
- Laing, Ronald D, *Self and Others* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)
- Laing, Ronald D, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990)
- Laing, Ronald D, *The Politics of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975)
- Law, Larry, *Spectacular Times: 1-14* (London: Dark Star Press, 1993)
- Lowe, Stephen, 'Joint Stock and The Ragged -Trousered Philanthropists: Letters from a Workshop', *Dartington Theatre Papers*, No 2, Series III, (1978)
- Lowe, Stephen, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London, Methuen, 1983)
- Lukács, Georg, *Writer and Critic* (London: Merlin Press, 1978)
- Liotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)
- Liotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (London: Turnaround, 1992)
- Marcuse, Herbert, *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Enquiry into Freud* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987)
- Marwick, Arthur, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Mercer, David, *After Haggerty* (London: Methuen, 1970)
- McGrath, John, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (Eyre Methuen, London, 1981)
- McGrath, John, *The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil* (London: Methuen Drama, 1980)
- McGrath, John, 'The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 9, No 35, (1979).
- McGrath, John, *Yobbo Nowt* (London: Pluto Plays, 1978)
- Miller, Jonathan, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana, 1971)
- Murphy, Richard, *Theorising the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Neville, Richard, *Playpower* (London: Paladin, 1970)
- Noel-Evans, Martha, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1991)
- Oglesby, Carl, ed, *The New Left Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 1969)
- O'Neil, Doris, ed, *Life, The 60s* (Toronto: Bullfinch, 1989)
- Perez, Rolando, *On An[Archy] and Schizoanalysis* (New York: Autonomedia, 1990)
- Pierson, Christopher, *The Marx Reader* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997)

Plant, Sadie, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Plant, Sadie, 'The Situationist International: A Case of Spectacular Neglect', *Radical Philosophy* 55, Summer, (1990)

Plekhanov, G.V., *Art and Social Life* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970)

Poliakoff, Stephen, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997)

Poole, Mike and Wyver, John, *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television* (London: BFI Books, 1984)

Ratgeb, *Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle* (London: Elephant Editions, 1990)

Reader, Keith, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993)

Rees, Roland, *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre*, (London: Oberon Books, 1992)

Richter, Hans, *Dada: art and anti-art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965)

Roszak, Theodor, *The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society & Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971)

Rowbotham, Sheila, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001)

Russell Taylor, John, 'British Dramatists: The New Arrivals', *Plays and Players*, Vol 18, No 5, (1971)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *St Genet: Actor and Martyr* (New York: Braziller, 1963)

Saussure, F.de, *Course in General Linguistics*, (London, Duckworth, 1995)

Seidler, Victor, *Unreasonable Men* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Simon, Rodger, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991)

Sked, Allen and Cook, Chris, *Post-War Britain: A Political History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993)

Soper, Kate, *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

Sturrock, John, *Structuralism*, 2nd edn (London: Fontana Press, 1993)

Styan, John, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: 1 Realism and Naturalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Touraine, Alain, *The Return of the Actor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988)

Vaneigem, Raoul, *The Book of Pleasures* (London: Pending Press, 1983)

Vaneigem, Raoul, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994)

Viénet, René, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* (New York: Autonomedia/Rebel Press, 1992)

Wesker, Arnold, *Volume 1: The Wesker Trilogy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979)

Willet, John, ed, *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1978)

Williams, Heathcote, *AC/DC* (London: Calder, 1983)

Williams, Raymond, *Culture* (London: Fontana Press, 1981)

Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993)

Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988)

Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)

Williams, Raymond, *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989)

Wilson, Snoo, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999)

Wilson, Snoo, *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000)

Winnicott, Donald. W., *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1994)