

**American Influence on the Alternative Theatre Movement in Britain 1956 - 1980**

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### Thesis Abstract

This thesis argues that American experimental theatre practice was one key factor in the development of an important phase in the history of the alternative theatre movement in Britain during the period 1956-1980. The data for this thesis has been collected through interviews, archival work and a review of existing literature on post-war British theatre including the alternative theatre movement. The theoretical superstructure and modes of analysis build upon key concepts and theories in the work of Elizabeth Burns (1972) and Baz Kershaw (1992, 1999). The main historical developments or phenomena referred to are the activities of the experimental theatre groups associated with Jim Haynes, Charles Marowitz, Nancy Meckler and Ed Berman, four expatriate American theatre practitioners living in Britain during the time period 1956 – 1980.

In addition this thesis examines important American based groups, Living Theatre (1947), Open Theatre (1964), La MaMa (1960) and Bread and Puppet (1965), which performed in Britain and which made an impact during the same period. The study also examines a wide range of indigenous British groups, Pip Simmons (1968), Foco Novo (1972-1989), Joint Stock (1974-1989), as well as institutions, RSC (1961), Royal Court (1956) and individuals such as Max Stafford-Clark, Thelma Holt, John Arden, Anne Jellicoe and the Portable playwrights (1968-1972) which in one way or another were influenced by American exemplars.

It is important to state clearly that this study does not claim that American experimental theatre and performance practices were the only influence on this important phase in the history of alternative theatre in Britain. This study simply claims that prevailing themes as well as American experimental theatre groups and performance practices had a key impact which has not been properly acknowledged or examined by scholars. Such an examination will contribute to a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the forces which shaped the alternative theatre movement in Britain.

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## Chapter One: Introduction and context

This thesis argues that American experimental theatre practice as it developed after World War II in New York was one key factor in the development of an important phase in the history of the alternative theatre movement in Britain during the period 1956-1980. The data for this thesis has been collected through interviews, archival work and a review of existing literature on post-war British theatre including the alternative theatre movement. The theoretical superstructure and modes of analysis build upon key concepts and theories in the work of Elizabeth Burns (1972) and Baz Kershaw (1992, 1999). The main historical developments or phenomena referred to are the activities of the experimental theatre groups associated with Jim Haynes, Charles Marowitz, Nancy Meckler and Ed Berman, four expatriate American theatre practitioners living in Britain during the time period 1956 – 1980. In addition this thesis examines important American based groups, Living Theatre (1947), Open Theatre (1964), La MaMa (1960) and Bread and Puppet (1965), which performed in Britain and which made an impact during the same period. The study also addresses a wide range of indigenous British groups, Pip Simmons (1968), Foco Novo (1972-1989), Joint Stock (1974-1989), as well as institutions, RSC (1961), Royal Court (1956) and individuals such as Max Stafford-Clark, and in passing Thelma Holt, John Arden, and the Portable playwrights (1968-1972) which in one way or another were influenced by American exemplars. As Colin Chambers observes of developments following 1956,

Significant early manifestations of this [American] influence included the 1967 visit of Café La MaMa and the Open Theatre; the opening the following year of the Arts Lab, which spawned the People Show, Pip Simmons and the Freehold; Portable Theatre and Marowitz's Open Space; Ed Berman's Inter-Action and its Other Company (directed by Naftali Yavin), exploring new relationships between actor, director and audience; the Traverse in Edinburgh, with its workshop offering a new

involvement for writers; the different combinations of left-wing theatre – Unity, Centre 42, CAST, Red Ladder; women's theatre, black theatre, gay theatre, theatre-in-education, physical theatre, community theatre, lunchtime theatre and so on. (Chambers 1980: 7-8)

This study examines terms and modes of analysis in relation to a wider historiographical context. It examines the exchange of American cultural and political ideology through theatre and performance as well as important cultural institutions. This study will contextualise American influence by addressing ideas that were revolutionising broader culture and draw a parallel between the practices and practitioners examined and theoretical movements which provided the intellectual force behind changes in theatrical strategies. The deconstruction of canonical texts, collectively authored theatre and performance and innovative approaches to text, language and physicality will be discussed with reference to relevant cultural frameworks.

In presenting this study the lead-in material includes two chapters. The first chapter introduces a discussion of the core argument of the thesis and its implications. The second chapter includes a map of the thesis, a methodology statement and a description of the methods used throughout the thesis project. The literature review has been integrated and is framed around the central research question. The core chapters of the thesis involve a combination of analytic and argumentative explanations derived from different components of the research. The final chapter then integrates conclusions drawn from the core chapters through analysis and discussion.

It is important to state clearly that this study does not claim that American experimental theatre and performance practices were the only influence on this important phase in the history of alternative theatre in Britain. There were other important theatrical influences including Brecht as well as separately Ionesco, Genet, Beckett (what Martin Esslin

categorised as the 'Theatre of the Absurd' in 1961). In his 1961 book Esslin suggests that theatre had a delayed reaction to movements which had changed other art forms earlier in the twentieth century such as abstract expressionism. American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain during this period should be considered as one aspect within a larger movement in British culture. There were also indigenous groups such as the Unity Theatres, Theatre Workshop with Joan Littlewood and, in its early years Ewan McColl, and the network of groups described in Norman Marshall's book *The Other Theatre* (1947). This study simply claims that American experimental theatre groups and performance practices as well as prevailing themes had a key impact which has not been properly acknowledged or examined by scholars. Such an examination will contribute to a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the forces which shaped the alternative theatre movement in Britain.

Jim Haynes, Charles Marowitz, Nancy Meckler and Ed Berman became key figures in an important new phase in the development of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. The groups and people associated with these four individuals would serve to delineate the antithetical purpose of the alternative theatre movement and establish an engagement between this sector and the commercial theatre establishment which could be argued had dialectical characteristics. A synthesis of alternative and mainstream characteristics has emerged and influenced the British theatre as a whole into a more comprehensive level of engagement with British society. In this a somewhat more representative and comprehensive number of communities and voices find representation. One could go to the most commercial West End Theatre in the present day and identify characteristics, such as increased emphasis on physicality and non-verbal expression, and trace this trend to the influence of the alternative theatre movement 1956-1980. A number of the interviewees for this study

explicitly made the point that, as in several other societies, there is a tendency in Britain for mainstream theatre to draw direct influence from the alternative theatre.

*Altered Practices, Performance Efficacies and Contemporary Literary Theory*

In a conventional twentieth-century proscenium arch actor/audience scenario the audience is a part of an active/passive relationship. In conventional narrative-text-character based theatre the reception of the performance will be optically and auditorily focused and selective with regard to the incidents and their narrative significance. The audience member will sit in a designated position which orientates in a certain direction. The seat is fixed to the floor and the lights are extinguished except for a specific area where the performance activity is located. The audience is expected to acquiesce in a level of subordination and passivity. Ultimately alternative theatre, as its label implies, seeks varieties of alternatives to such a rigid twentieth-century format.

This study has identified certain markers of American alternative theatre practice which have dramatically altered the expectations of conventional theatre in the UK as well as the US to this day. Those characteristics include a subversion of conventional narrative, the exploration of non-traditional time, experimentation with location and space, an emphasis on a diversity of voices and new approaches to the physicalisation of performance. Alternative British theatre productions during the study period, and after, have adopted, variously, a 'Pass the hat' economy, experimentation with audience and stage configuration and relationship (Total Space), artistic experimentation with form and content, Post-Brechtian forms of political engagement, non-traditional venues and audiences (lunchtime theatre, buses), non-narrative and language based (physical theatre), use of American 'Method' techniques, anti-class based form and content, and the use of obscene language and nudity. In addition British alternative theatre included experimentation with language (physicalisation and obscenity),



experimentation with form (performance art and one-acts) and a breaking down of traditional hierarchies in terms of the economics and process of production as well as the actor/audience relationship. Further it has explored issues of identity as expressed in theatre in ways which problematise and challenge perception of national identity in terms of any single overarching or homogenising categorisation.

Such changes in practice derived from pressures of the moment, including complex relationships among and between theatre practitioners, complex intellectual and artistic influences upon those practitioners, and changes in production possibilities. Marowitz, for example, read Artaud at a critical moment in his artistic development, responding to Artaud's principles in specific theatre contexts. The specific reading histories of Haynes, Meckler and Berman are less clear, but it is important to recognise that all four of the practitioners studied in this thesis, like performers in the theatres they founded, were all subject to movements culturally available to them at the time. Changes in theatre practice studied here paralleled major discoveries and shifts in literary theory before and during the period 1956-1980.

Alternative theatre practices model certain ideas articulated by post-formalist, structuralist, Marxist, deconstructionist and post-colonialist theorists. All of these theories had ideological implications. Though systematic analysis of these phenomena have been beyond the scope of this thesis, and my research shows that the practitioners presented here did not 'read' literary theory systematically, it is useful to identify certain theoretical movements or arguments prevalent in the intellectual and academic culture of the time.

Marxist ideologies were present and publicly available from the early twentieth century in Britain and America. The call to reassess existing economic conditions in relation to the cultural superstructures they engendered and sustained, as well as the Marxist call to change the world, were clearly present at the level of contestation and assumption in the foundation of Women's, Gay, Black and Age-related theatres during the period studied here. Such ideas

had become 'natural' as a form of discourse, to some extent, for many of the playwrights and practitioners studied here.

Formalist claims were also clearly available in Britain, given the work of IA Richards and others in forming a text-focused drive to interpretation. Alternative theatre, it could be claimed, contested text-based theatre, countering in practice the claims formalist theorist in the Anglo-American tradition made. Alternative theatre deconstructed the text as primary to dramatic performance and relinquished fixed text in favor of collective creation of language. It could be said that alternative theatre 1956-1980 offered a critique of text-based analysis even as it advocated collective action intended to 'change the world', both concepts with antecedents in Marxist theory. Similarly, audience participation and broken barriers between actor and audience could be claimed to represent resistance to 'class' and resistance to existing cultural institutions by a formerly 'passive' set of spectators, the audience.

The practice of 'laying bare' and the use of unusual devices in theatrical performance and technique has roots in Brecht but also in continental formalism. The contingencies of production and performance valued by alternative American theatre and transmitted to British alternative theatre could be claimed to parallel notions of relativity, and the deconstruction of text as primary might be aligned with Jacques Derrida's notions of decentred text.

Undermining assumptions about who an audience could be and what it did could lead to redefinitions of race, gender and identity as subjects for theatre. Finally collective construction of plays can be said to echo Roland Barthes' assertions about the 'death of the author'. The potential reference to Barthes is certainly appropriate to the study period, and the analyst has to be careful. For Barthes 'death of the author' included the idea that everything is 'always already written' and that writers recombine what others have thought and written before. Clearly that is not the case with alternative theatre which innovated, sometimes outrageously.

These possible parallels would form a valuable study in future but were beyond the scope of this thesis as planned and written.

*Alternative Theatre and the Nature of Nationhood*

‘I had no idea that England was broke. I will go over there and make a couple of talks and take over the British Empire.’ (Clarke 2008: 47)

These words were spoken by the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a private conversation with his Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau in August 1944 while preparing for the Quebec Conference, held the following month and attended by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King. While Roosevelt may have intended his comments on some level to be ironic and to remain private, nonetheless they remain revealing. Between 1942 and 1945, three million Americans passed through Great Britain. It was the largest ever encounter between Americans and the British people in history. At one point before the D-Day invasion Americans made up six percent of the resident population of Great Britain (Reynolds 1995: 431- 433).

By the end of World War II, as was set out in Chapter Two, Europe’s GDP has fallen by roughly twenty-five percent while that of the United States had risen by fifty percent.

Britain’s economic losses throughout the war would lead to considerable long-term national debt and the end of empire. There was, post-war, a shift of political and cultural power and influence to the United States, which can be seen to date from the September 1944 Quebec Conference involving Churchill, Roosevelt and other Allies

By the end of World War II the joint Gross Domestic Product of Europe had fallen by about twenty-five percent while the Gross National Product of the United States rose during the war years by over fifty percent in real terms (Clarke 2008: xiv). Britain was saddled with enormous war debt while America avoided any damage to its mainland. Britain survived the

war but the cost would ultimately lead to the loss of empire (Clarke 2008: 508-512). Britain's war debts were not fully repaid to the United States and Canada until the year 2006. The Cold War solidified the current arrangement of US military bases scattered throughout the United Kingdom.

As late as the 1920s Britain controlled a quarter of the world's territory and a quarter of its total population. However, primarily as a consequence of changes necessitated by World War II the British Empire was to a large extent dismantled. These changes, as noted above, can be formally dated from the Quebec Conference in September 1944 which involved Churchill, Roosevelt and other war time allies as they began to plan for a post-war scenario. For the British this would involve the loss of India and Palestine. The Commonwealth as it exists today was formulated in 1949 as a free association of equal and independent countries, in effect to replace the Empire, though the process of decolonisation took two more decades to be fulfilled (Clarke 2008: 505).

Besides the fact that the Americans Jim Haynes and Charles Marowitz were living and working in Britain from 1956 onward another reason for marking the beginning of the main focus of this study from 1956 was that it could be argued that there was an important generational shift taking place within British theatre itself as well as within British culture and society more generally. As prosperity began to return in the mid-1950s, the empire began to disintegrate throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a process, after the loss of India and Palestine in the 1940s, accelerated by dirty wars in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden and the 1956 Suez debacle. Young men who had all, unless medically unfit or on grounds of conscience, to complete up to two years of National Service in the armed forces were beginning to rebel against the social and cultural constraints their parents took for granted, while young people of both sexes were beginning to question the values of a wartime generation. Meanwhile, as part of this process of generational rebellion, on both sides of the Atlantic, a Rock n Roll

generation was emerging whose music was influenced by American country and rhythm and blues music, both themselves emerging from cultures which ran counter to the hegemonic White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture which up till this period dominated American (and British) society. During the 1950s General Eisenhower, who embodied in many ways older attitudes, was elected to the US presidency twice and former soldiers who were now in their thirties applied the discipline and group ethos that was engrained during the War into civilian activities. Meanwhile the younger generation who had greater educational opportunities as well as fewer financial restrictions and arguably, as a consequence, a greater emphasis on individual fulfilment emerged as a characteristic of the new 'Baby Boom' generation which by the late 1950s was entering its teenage years. Teenagers began to have a tendency to assert their identity and it was in part because of these contrasts and contributing factors that a generational clash grew on both sides of the Atlantic, in which many American influences played an influential role. Political turbulence in the 1960s encouraged women to re-examine their status in American and British society. Initially their claims were largely ignored, not only by the establishment, but also by male-dominated hegemonic political organisations which constituted the 'Nation'. In the 1970s the women's movement provided a new discourse on gender and sexuality that interrogated the patriarchal norms in society. The contraceptive pill arrived in Britain in 1961 but it was not widely available for women outside of marriage until 1974. In 1963 in the United States Gloria Steinem, a freelance journalist, became a Playboy Bunny on an undercover assignment for *Show* magazine. She exposed low pay, sexual harassment and racism. In 1966 the National Organisation for Women was created in the United States. Women were made dependent economically as they were paid much less money and also needed a signature from their father or husband to gain credit. In 1968 women working at the Ford plant in Dagenham went on strike for equal pay. The Dagenham, England, strike led to the Equal Pay Act in 1970 which was followed in 1975

by the Sex Discrimination Act. In 1970 women organised a highly theatrical protest at the annual Miss World contest held in London that year. Importantly, the women's theatre groups which emerged out of Ed Berman's season of feminist plays gave a theatrical outlet and voice to this movement in Britain and furthermore many of the other theatre groups which were a part of the identity theatre of the 1970s in Britain started with seasons produced by Ed Berman.

In 1960 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan addressed the South African Parliament in Cape Town and stated, 'The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact' (Younge 2013: 12). Over the next three years Togo, Mali, Senegal, Zaire, Somalia, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, and Tanganyika all became independent, as did colonies in other parts of the world, like Jamaica. Successful anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia also encouraged ethnic pride and stimulated separate cultural nationalist movements amongst African American, Chicano and Native American populations.

Such groups used the theatre to write their histories in the face of historic misrepresentation, calling attention to the suffering that they had endured and the struggles in which they were engaged. They showed that the dominant discourse in America had served the purposes of certain privileged groups and had disenfranchised others. In the late 1960s many ethnic-based groups produced work within and for their own communities. Example of this included the Black Revolutionary Theatre, Teatro Campesino and the Vietnam Veterans against the War, significant groups that called for urgent social and political change and took their message to the American people. The Teatro Campesino created work that initially responded to the 1965 strike in California by the United Farmworkers and performed on a flatbed truck in the fields. The Vietnam Veterans Against the War mounted 'search and destroy' enactments in

the streets and country roads of the American heartland to persuade the American public to abandon the war in Vietnam and recognise their responsibility for the actions that were being committed overseas in their name. The Black Revolutionary Theatre had cultural centres in Harlem and Newark, New Jersey, where they produced drama, often in the streets that reflected the Black Power movement and Black Nationalism. This work was introduced to the British theatrical landscape in 1970-1971 with Ed Berman's *Black and White Power* Season of plays which then inspired Black British theatre groups and playwrights to launch their own projects.

Even before then, American events and theatre practices had had an influence on mainstream British theatre. The American involvement in Vietnam began on a covert basis in 1954 and lasted until the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. During this period there were several protest marches in Britain, many of which involved a certain level of theatricality and included such groups as Bread and Puppet. Peter Brook's production of the anti-Vietnam war play *US* at the Aldwych Theatre took place in 1966. During the rehearsal process for *US* Brook and the RSC consulted with both Susan Sontag and Joseph Chaikin (Chambers 2004: 155). The Off Off Broadway movement also had a direct influence on the founding of the Other Place and Warehouse spaces at the Royal Shakespeare Company (Chambers 1980).

More generally during the period 1956 to 1980 the group as opposed to the individual became the focus of organisations associated with what came to be known as alternative society. This trend was also reflected in the structure of alternative theatre organisations that emerged during this time period. It was demonstrated in their working process and also in the performance pieces which they produced. Instead of the method of the traditional theatre in which a playwright writes a script in isolation and then other artists produce it, a new method of working sought to create a method whereby the group itself developed the performance piece from an initial concept all the way to a public performance (Shank 1972: 4). This

method of working which is often referred to as 'devised' work is now commonly taught in specifically designed courses in British drama schools and is also common practice in British alternative theatre. The system of theatre censorship in Britain and taxation combined with a lack of public subsidy led to a situation where theatrical output was somewhat restricted. American work, meanwhile, was not created with the intention of satisfying these conditions and over time had a role in changing the prevailing environment in Britain.

### *National Contexts of International Influences*

In the sense that it was a theatre of ideas and social action and not strictly tied to the profit principle, the alternative theatre movement in Britain can be traced back to the 1890s and the British premiere productions of *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* by Ibsen and the founding of the Independent Theatre Society by Jack Thomas Grein in 1891 (Davies 1987: 36). The establishment of the Independent Theatre Society was indicative of a Europe-wide trend against the commercial theatre establishment, and the stated aim of the Independent Theatre Society was, 'to give special performances of plays which have a literary and artistic rather than a commercial value' (Davies 1987: 36). The Independent Theatre Society lasted for six years and produced twenty-eight plays during this period. It was replaced in 1899 by The Stage Society. Following subsequent phases in the development of the British alternative theatre movement, such as the Unity theatre movement that began in the 1930s, an important new phase came to grow and flourish during the 1950s and 1960s, characterised by certain variables mainly in the areas of means of production, artistic innovation and political activism. Alternative theatre and performance represented an attempt to reshape the perception of the nature of the nation and its theatre.

In the years after World War II an economic boom in the United States eventually created economic conditions during the 1950s which led to a need for an alternative to Broadway in



order to cultivate experimentation, discover new voices and test untried material which in the pre-war period would have been possible on Broadway (Aronson 2000: 4). An inflationary boom during the 1950s drove the costs of production on Broadway to unprecedented heights while at the same time Broadway's audiences were being lost to the cinema and to television (Bottoms 2004: 19). The increasingly severe economic imperatives of commercial Broadway Theatre meant that conventional producers were unwilling or unable to risk money on unfamiliar names and unconventional material so that full scale productions produced on Broadway of plays by unknown playwrights became very difficult. In this context the Off Broadway sector emerged.

However, during the late 1950s and early 1960s Off Broadway theatres also became increasingly commercial and as a consequence young theatre artists and writers began to form (and perform) in tiny cafes and non-theatre spaces such as church basements, lofts and living rooms. Most of these spaces were located in Greenwich Village or in the East Village and became associated with the label Off Off Broadway. Importantly, the emergence of these spaces and centres of fertilisation also coincided with the blossoming of the downtown arts scene. Poets, dancers, painters, musicians and filmmakers were simultaneously experimenting with art forms and community engagement in comparable ways.

Julian Beck, the co-founder of the ground-breaking Living Theatre, for example, was himself an abstract expressionist painter of some renown. Together with his wife Judith Malina they saw the purpose of the Living Theatre was to introduce the new movements expressed in experimental dance, music, painting and poetry into live theatre (Bottoms 2004: 25). There was a breaking of traditional art form boundaries in the earlier part of the century as exemplified by the artists involved with Gertrude Stein in Paris but the theatre itself experienced a delayed reaction to these changes (Esslin 1961). When considering the overall influence of American experimental theatre and performance practices emerging from post-

war New York on the British theatrical landscape from 1956 to 1980 the introduction of experimentation of this kind into contemporary theatre practice in line with developments in contemporaneous art, dance, music and poetry is of primary significance.

Many commentators describe the alternative theatre movement in Britain as emerging from an international 'counter culture' during the 1960s (Ansorge 1975, Itzin 1980, Kershaw 1992). This study attempts to avoid the hyperbole and inflated rhetoric often associated with talk of an international 'counter culture' and emphasises through close examination the particular national origin of prevailing themes and practices. Many of the revolutionary practices which were introduced through the Arts Lab on Drury Lane and the Traverse by the American experimental theatre practitioners detailed in this study can be traced to Greenwich Village and the East Village in New York City and the Off Off Broadway movement which began to take shape during the 1950s and included such groups and venues as the Living Theatre, Open Theatre, La MaMa Troupe, Bread and Puppet, Cafe Cino, Theatre Genesis and the Judson Poets' Theatre. There certainly were contemporaneous examples of European experimentalism in the theatre such as Grotowski, Fo, Lecoq, Muller, Barba, Kantor and Brook. This study recognises their importance as substantial and will later reflect in particular on the place of Brook within the argument, but this thesis is concerned with an area of influence which up till now has received less attention than these European experimentalists although perhaps in some way has been more influential on general theatre practice.

There were also prevailing American political and social crises which were of primary significance during this period in the alternative theatre in Britain including the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement, even to the exclusion of contemporaneous British social and political developments such as growing tension in Northern Ireland and the status of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities (Ansorge 1975: 22-37). 'Cultural' and 'ideological' transactions took place and were brought about through the rupturing of

established norms and contexts which were facilitated by the anti-hierarchical use of space, interdisciplinary content and inclusive modes of audience assemblage and participatory performance practices (Aronson 2000: 7).

On 21 December 1968 in an article entitled 'The "Arts Lab Explosion"' Irving Wardle wrote in *The Times* that he was pessimistic about the future of experimental theatre in England. The reason he gave was that he thought that experimental work was merely an extension of American underground theatre. He believed that experimental performance was entirely alien to England whereas America had a tradition of acting ensembles such as the Living Theatre and the Open Theatre. He claimed that England had nothing except the music-hall tradition to rely upon for improvisational techniques. Although Wardle's statement is Anglo-centric and he did not mention the work of Terence Gray, Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl or the work of the Unity Theatres in London and Glasgow during the post-war period this sentiment was echoed by both Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz at different times. Originally they were actually considering basing the Royal Shakespeare Company Experimental Group in Paris because they both felt it would be a more fertile environment for experimental theatre. The improvisational techniques Wardle was referring to were indicative of post-Brechtian practice such as those of the Living Theatre as well as American derivatives of Stanislavski and, although there was experimental work included in the Edinburgh Festival programmes during the 1950s, there was no permanent year-round base for this category of performance before the establishment of the Traverse Theatre club in January 1963.

Starting in January 1963 with the opening of the Traverse and later the Drury Lane Arts Lab in August 1967 the experimental theatre practices which would later pervade the alternative theatre movement in Britain found seedbeds in which to flourish. However the Traverse and Arts Lab were by no means the only places where American experimental theatre practices intersected with the advent of this important new phase in the history of the alternative

theatre movement in Britain. Experimental theatre almost by definition was limited to tiny and unrepresentative audiences. Nonetheless I argue that experimental theatre had a special place in the mix of interlinking subcultures which by the end of the 1970s had transformed the British theatrical landscape and that it had identifiable effects on subsequent social and cultural developments. The theatres, clubs, restaurants, pubs and festivals in which the experimental work took place were important physical locations around which a particular subculture itself overlapped with several other subcultures (Marwick 1998: 341).

For us the “spirit of the times” means off-off-Broadway, Grotowski, and the Becks, more than anything we can claim as our own. Anyone who knew the East Village scene five years ago will find nothing new in the British underground’s cartoon-strip treatments of American myth, Civil Rights reworkings of Greek tragedy, and celebrations of group-audience togetherness at the expense of coherence and skill. To that extent, the British avant-garde is more institutionalized than the most hidebound rep. And its dependence on foreign example is apparent in the fact that its three originating impresarios were all American. Charles Marowitz, Jim Haynes and Ed Berman (in order of arrival) each added a separate American strain to the British subculture (Wardle 1971: 178)

This British subculture was originally known as underground theatre and later alternative theatre, experimental theatre and fringe theatre (Marwick 1998: 355). For the sake of coherence this study refers to these groups altogether under the heading of alternative theatre. Peter Schumann, the founder of Bread and Puppet Theatre, declared in the early 1960s that ‘The audience which doesn’t go to the theatre is always the best audience.’ (Brecht: 1988, 609) Similarly the young David Hare of the British Portable Theatre insisted in the early 1970s that, ‘Our aggressiveness is immensely conscious. I suppose it stems from a basic contempt for people who go to the theatre.’ (Davies 1987: 170)

Broadly speaking, the defining characteristic of 'alternative' theatre is that it is not designed to satisfy the profit principle and is on some level intended as an alternative to the commercial theatre establishment and status quo. However 'alternative' theatre also suggests certain changes in the configuration of the theatre or performance venue itself such as theatre in the open or in the round without a traditional proscenium arch dividing actors from audience. 'Traverse' is actually a derivation of 'Transverse' and it is worth noting that Stephen Joseph, who earned a degree at the University of Iowa, returned to Britain from the United States in 1955 and then, after developing his ideas first on tour and then at Stoke-on-Trent, started his theatre in the round in Scarborough because of his experience of experimentation with this stage configuration in the American theatre. In the UK it was after the Traverse Theatre club opened in January 1963 that the plethora of smaller studio theatres with modified stage configurations began to proliferate.

The most extreme experimental plays required a nonconventional setting but it was also possible for experimental plays to be put on in a traditional theatre as well. An interesting case in point is the Royal Court Theatre, a traditional theatre on a smaller scale some distance from London's West End. It was the site for many productions important to the general history of the alternative theatre in Britain including the days when it was still the Court Theatre and producing the works of Shaw and later in the 1950s producing Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and the plays of Samuel Beckett. In the 1960s the Royal Court also opened the Theatre Upstairs which was a club theatre with a flexible audience and stage configuration. By concentrating on a range of theatres outside of the established metropolitan and commercial circuits we can trace the proliferation of experimental practices. It should be noted that sometimes plays from the most alternative of backgrounds ultimately ended up in the most established of theatre spaces.

During the 1960s several new American writers of promise had plays presented in London including Mart Crowley, Jules Feiffer, Jack Gelber, Arthur Kopit, Paddy Chayefsky, Gore Vidal and most notably Edward Albee. Gore Vidal's *The Visit to a Small Planet* was produced in London in 1960. Jack Gelber's brutally candid view of drug addicts in *The Connection* performed by the Living Theatre in 1961 had a run at the Duke of York's Theatre. In 1965 the Arts Theatre produced Jules Feiffer's *Crawling Arnold* for a brief run and the RSC presented *Little Murders* in 1967 and *God Bless* in 1968. Arthur Kopit's most important theatrical venture in London occurred in 1968 when the Royal Shakespeare Company presented the world premiere of *Indians* which ran in repertory for thirty-four performances. Paddy Chayefsky's *The Latent Heterosexual* was staged at the Aldwych Theatre in 1968 by the RSC. Crowley's study of New York homosexuals *The Boys in the Band* was produced in 1969 and ran for 396 performances at the Wyndham's Theatre.

Edward Albee was unlike most of the other playwrights in this group from the 1960s and was able to repeat his commercial success in London. His first Broadway play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* opened at the Globe Theatre in London in 1964 and won acclaim from the critics and ran for 489 performances. Albee's other Broadway works however were presented in repertory. The RSC produced *A Delicate Balance* in 1969, *Tiny Alice* in 1970 and *All Over* in 1972. Three of Albee's shorter works which established his reputation before he began to have productions on Broadway also had performances in smaller more experimental London Theatres. In 1960 the Arts Theatre produced *The Zoo Story* with *This Property is Condemned*, a one-act play by Tennessee Williams. *The Zoo Story* was revived in 1965 and appeared with Moliere's *George Dandin* at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. The Royal Court presented *The American Dream* and *The Death of Bessie Smith* on a double bill in 1961 for 423 performances. From the middle of the 1960s onward a new group of American playwrights like Edward Albee had works presented in Off Broadway theatres and these

plays began to be produced in clubs and lunchtime venues and other small theatres in London. Plays by Ed Bullins, Michael McClure and Jean Claude Van Itallie appeared in London during the 1960s. During the 1970s Terrence McNally and Sam Shepard also stand out among this group of new experimental writers.

Intriguingly the alternative theatre of the 1960s and 1970s was profoundly influenced by the Americans with the interesting twist that American alternative theatre initially received far more acclaim in Europe than it did in the United States (Crespy 2003: 86-87). What was taking place during the 1960s and 1970s was a loose constellation of activities whose objectives at times were very different but, although there was never a singular unifying premise or manifesto, there was a shared antipathy to the conformity and commercialism of mainstream society and mainstream theatre. Creating a context in which theatre artists could truly be free to express themselves meant abandoning any adherence to the profit principle. When assessing the practices of these groups in material terms it is of great significance that many of them endeavoured not to charge money for tickets. In the first major *New York Times* article on the scene in 1965 it was described as the 'pass the hat circuit' (Bottoms 2004: 3). This also became a characteristic of many of the alternative theatre groups operating in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, at least during the early phase of their respective histories (Marowitz 1990: 21).

To summarise, this study describes a collection of American experimental theatre and performance practices which came to influence the practices of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. What happened in the post-war era was the evolution of a theatre diametrically opposed to the conventions of drama as literature common in the West since the Renaissance. It was an approach that rejected the beliefs and expectations of traditional audiences, complemented experimental influences developing in Europe like the work of Grotowski and Fo, and radically altered both the aesthetic and organisational basis upon

which performance was created. These cultural and ideological intersections in turn helped to shape the ideological identity of the alternative theatre movement during this period.



## Chapter Two: Methodology

The first chapter set out an initial framework for the context of this study, which examines terms and modes of analysis in relation to the wider historical context of the development of an important phase in the history of the alternative theatre movement in Britain from 1956 - 1980. This chapter then outlines the methodology by which the research for this thesis proceeded in exploring this context. The study incorporates analysis of individual productions in tandem with the evolution of experimental groups which emerged during this period. Further, it establishes the background context of the exchange of American cultural and political ideology into British alternative theatre and performance with references dating back to the productions of American plays in the 1930s by left-wing theatre groups such as Unity Theatre. It employs concepts of 'cultural transaction' and 'ideological transaction' (Kershaw 1992) to analyse American influences on British Theatre with particular emphasis on the advent of an important phase in the history of the alternative theatre movement in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s. This study will seek to further elucidate the phenomenon of cultural and political ideological exchange by way of theatre and performance and trace its origins. Examining and contextualising this cultural exchange between Britain and the US provides an opportunity to explore and assess theatre and performance efficacy in shaping modes of cultural production.

'Performance efficacy' is a critical term for this study. 'Efficacy' has a range of possible meanings, practical and theoretical. A performance is efficacious if it produces, induces, or provokes an effective 'transaction' (e.g. exchange) between performers and audience.

'Transaction' means that an audience participates in the performance event—both at the moment of performance and potentially thereafter as the audience remembers and enacts intentions brought to consciousness during performance. Forced to participate in the

performance, audiences look afresh at social, political, religious, legal and personal assumptions. The goal of participatory theatre is to effect change (Kershaw 1992: 257-258).

Context ('contextuality') determines 'performance efficacy': a successful radical production creates its own context which is immediate, momentary and directed to the specific moment and audience of the production. Efficacious performances are also intertextual—actors adopt conventions, language and gesture from the audience or presumed audience into the performance text, in certain cases spontaneously. Performances are localised, contingent, open and dialogic, allowing for transactions cultural and ideological among audience, players and text (Kershaw 1992: 257).

In the social sciences there are two main paradigms that form the basis of research. The question that divides the two is whether the methodology of the physical sciences can be applied to the study of social phenomena. The paradigm that is rooted in the physical sciences is called the systematic, scientific, or positivist approach. The other paradigm is referred to as the qualitative, ethnographic, ecological or naturalistic approach. Each approach has developed its own values, terminology, methods and techniques to understand social phenomena and since the 1960s there has been recognition that both paradigms have their place (Kumar 2005: 13). The qualitative mode of enquiry for this study is determined by the research purpose.

The process of formulating the research problem consisted of a number of steps. The first step was identifying a broad field or subject area of great interest on a personal level. This broad field of interest was American influence on post-war British theatre. Although this topic was of relevance with regards to the existing body of knowledge the magnitude of such a study would be beyond the scope of what is possible within the framework of research for a three-year Ph.D.. The next step was to dissect this broad area of interest into more specific

sub-categories. Then through the process of selecting what was of most interest among these sub-categories it was possible to specify the topic of American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain from 1956 to 1980. The period 1956 to 1980 was selected for two main reasons. Firstly, it was the time period in which all the individuals and groups discussed in this thesis were living and working in the UK. Secondly, this period coincided with a cluster of important and relevant cultural and political developments both in Britain and elsewhere which will be clearly detailed throughout this study.

The next step was to raise several questions pertaining specifically to the chosen topic. Then through a process of elimination the research question was identified. *In what way and to what extent were conventions of performance in British alternative theatre altered by American influence from 1956 to 1980?* Through clearly identifying the research question the main objective and sub-objectives of the study emerged. In the first instance this study seeks to establish the existence of an interrelationship between American experimental theatre and performance practices and the evolution of conventions of performance in the British alternative theatre between 1956 and 1980. Thereafter this study attempts to clarify why and how this interrelationship came into being and explore how these changes influenced British culture, identity and society.

Examining the literature had the danger of becoming a never-ending task but as the thesis project is time-limited it was important to set parameters by reviewing literature in relation to the main themes pertinent to the research topic. In reviewing the literature it soon became clear that the topic under investigation had roots in a number of theories that have already been developed from a number of different perspectives. The information obtained from different books and articles such as *Theatricality* (Burns 1972), *Stages in the Revolution* (Itzin 1980) and *The Politics of Performance* (Kershaw 1992) needed to be sorted with the main themes and theories in mind. It was important to highlight both agreements and

disagreements among the relevant authors and then identify any gaps and unanswered questions. The existing literature deals with a number of aspects that have both a direct and indirect bearing on the research topic. These aspects were used as a basis for developing this study's theoretical framework.

For example Baz Kershaw (*The Politics of Performance* 1992, *The Radical in Performance* 1999) identifies and explores the transmission of radical ideology through the alternative and community theatre movements of the late 1960s and 1970s by tracing the evolution of this theatre movement and its larger impact on British society. Kershaw along with others including (Ansorge 1975, Itzin 1980, Craig ed. 1980) identify the short lived Drury Lane Arts Lab (1967-1969) as the birthplace of the alternative theatre movement in Britain (Kershaw 1992:100). Kershaw's work is important for this study because he succeeds in creating a theoretical framework for describing, analysing and questioning the ability of experimental British theatre to achieve 'performance efficacy' thereby providing an example for this study to build on. His work is detailed, original and important, but it does not take into account American influences on British theatre during this critical period and even dating back to the origins of the Unity Theatre, influences which need to be identified and assessed if Kershaw's analysis is to be sustained.

Kershaw describes the alternative theatre movement as part of a larger contemporaneous 'counter culture'. For Kershaw, three characteristics of a new commitment to 'counter-culture values' and to radical ideology are visible in, and outcomes of, alternative theatre productions: (a) the decentring of the written text as the chief source of communicative signs in production, (b) performance event as an experience of participatory democracy, and (c) theatre as a radical response to the hegemony of the Western status quo. However it is also possible to show that the advent of the alternative theatre movement was influenced by overriding crises and trends with a particular national identity.

During the first three years of the English fringe movement the war in Vietnam figured more obsessively than did the increasingly explosive situation in Northern Ireland. Student protest seemed to be the prerogative of the Sorbonne and Berkeley rather than of Oxbridge. Racial tensions in US cities were more in evidence than were the problems faced by West Indians or Asians in having to settle in England. (Ansorge 1975: 23)

Kershaw describes the difficulty in accurately assessing the theatrical event and its impact on the subsequent behaviour of an audience. He discusses previous attempts to do so and addresses the difficulty in achieving conclusiveness and develops a methodological framework for analysing performance efficacy which is more theoretically and factually convincing.

What if we pay more attention to the *conditions* of performance that are *most likely* to produce an efficacious result? And what if we broaden the canvas for analysis beyond the individual or production (but still including it) in order to consider theatrical movements in relation to local and national cultural change? (Kershaw 1992: 3)

Kershaw defines performance as an ideological transaction insofar as spectators are actively engaged in the construction of meaning as the performance proceeds. The 'transaction' is the continuous negotiation between performers and audience, company and community to establish the significance of the signs and conventions through which they interact (Kershaw 1992: 257). If there is an ideological transaction at the heart of a performance event and the spectator is actively engaged in the construction of meaning as the performance proceeds, then we must not only examine the theatrical event itself but the entire ritual in its totality. This includes both the 'gathering phase' as well as the 'dispersal phase' of the performance. We must examine both the individual instance of performance as well as the collection of practices. Kershaw's stress on alternative and community theatre as a mode of cultural

production was intended to reassert theatre's underlying coherence as a cultural movement (Kershaw 1992: 10). Kershaw adopts a notion of culture as a 'signifying system'. By this he means a system of signs by which groups, communities, organisations and institutions recognise and communicate with each other in the process of becoming more or less influential formations within society. 'Culture' is the medium which can unite a range of different groups and communities in a common project in order to make them into an ideological force operating for or against the status quo. (Kershaw 1992: 36)

If I could demonstrate the ways in which the potential efficacy of particular shows related to the possible general efficacy of the movement, this might produce a convincing case for the impact of alternative theatre on British social and political history. Very few studies of this kind have been undertaken for any theatrical movement, and certainly the job has not been done for British alternative theatre. (Kershaw, 1992: 4)

Kershaw's work has been useful in helping to define the limits of this study. He is able to talk in terms of culture and society with reference to alternative and community theatre. It is important to note that his work is grounded in theoretical movements (Marxist/Structuralist/Formalist) which provide the context for changes in approach to text and language. This study endeavours to contribute an additional perspective regarding the potential efficacy of this part of British culture and society.

Throughout this thesis specific publications are examined as well as the overall contribution of particular scholars, critics and practitioners, whose work has helped to define, shape and spread the understanding, reception and practice of American influence on alternative theatre and performance in Britain. A review of journal articles on JSTOR and Project Muse has been combined with a search of previous Ph.D. theses as well as books, newspaper articles, reviews and archival material.

Any new work rests on an accumulation of previous and current literature but it is useful to bear in mind the 'value added' concept when determining if this study constitutes an original contribution to knowledge. When we pull in resources and then recombine and process them to create a different output then this difference may be referred to as a 'value added' contribution (Dunleavy 2003: 31). This means keeping a critical eye on the extent to which this study has transformed or enhanced or differentiated the starting materials which form the basis of the analysis. It also means retaining a strong relational pattern of argumentation in which the study appropriately acknowledges the extent to which it draws on the existing literature and other sources of information in accordance with historical method.

This study is based on the hypothesis that experimental theatre and performance practices, primarily developed in Off Off Broadway theatres in Greenwich Village in New York during the post-war period, were exchanged with the British alternative theatre during the period 1956 to 1980 and had the effect of altering conventions of performance. A detailed exploration of American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain 1956 to 1980 will provide an important new perspective in understanding contemporary British theatre and performance theory and practice. The proposition is stated in a testable form and it predicts a particular relationship between different variables.

### *Procedures*

Having identified what the study is about the next question was regarding how to go about conducting the study? What procedures would be effective in obtaining answers to research related questions? How to carry out the tasks needed to complete the different components of the research process? What should be done and what should not be done in the process of undertaking this study? Identifying the answers to these questions constituted the core of the research design for this thesis. The research design for this study is a procedural plan that was

adapted to answer questions as validly, dispassionately and accurately as possible within the framework of critical study. In order to create the research design for this thesis it was necessary to arrange conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aimed to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy of procedure.

I joined the British Library and compiled a comprehensive bibliography and interview list. I drafted a review of existing literature in keeping with the Outline Project Plan. I completed chapters on the American expatriate community working in the British alternative theatre 1956-1980. I conducted a search of previous Ph.D. theses and concluded that I will be able to make a legitimate claim to originality. I began the primary research phase of my project by recording interviews with my supervisors Ian Brown (2 February 2011) and Colin Chambers (16 February 2011). The purpose was to develop skills as an interviewer as well as access my supervisors' knowledge before interviewing people external to Kingston University.

The bulk of primary research for this project took place during the second year of my enrolment. Although there was a certain degree of overlap and I continued to meet and communicate with those I interviewed, I began the writing-up phase at the beginning of year three. The essential components of the methodology were face-to-face interviews, archival work and a comprehensive review of all relevant journal articles, Ph.D. theses and publications. To the extent that this study relies upon interview material it is germane to acknowledge certain inherent pitfalls in the process, and to outline how any potential problems with this approach have been mitigated. The interviewer needs to take into account issues regarding memory and recollection, self-mythologising on the part of the interviewee and the position of the interviewer in assessing the validity of the interview material. For example my personal association with the late Charles Marowitz pre-dated this study by fifteen years and so a process of triangulation with regard to examining specific events was employed. This included checking historical texts and newspapers with respect to facts



reported during the interview, as well as comparing and contrasting as many reputable sources of information as were available. It is also germane to mention that because this study examines hitherto neglected contributions to British alternative theatre, in certain cases the interview material represents singular insight.

I tape-recorded several hours of interviews with Jim Haynes, Nancy Meckler, Richard Demarco C.B.E. and Charles Marowitz. I met with Nancy Meckler and Richard Demarco, each multiple times, and accessed their archives. I also established a link with the Unfinished Histories Project run by Dr. Susan Croft, the official Inter-Action historian. I have since become an Unfinished Histories volunteer on a lottery funded project archiving material and interviews regarding the last fifty years of alternative theatre activity in the London boroughs of Camden and Lambeth. At the suggestion of my supervisors I ceased the interview stage following the completion of my annual monitoring in the autumn of 2012 and focused entirely on the writing-up phase of the thesis project.

The interview with Professor Brown included a discussion of his collaboration with Max Stafford-Clark as part of the Traverse Workshop Company. Max Stafford-Clark was the artistic director of the Traverse Theatre. Stafford-Clark went to New York for a period specifically to work with La MaMa and absorb their working process. When Stafford-Clark returned he wanted to set up the Traverse Workshop Company but the Traverse Board would not agree to a permanent company. As a result Stafford-Clark resigned as artistic director, although on good terms, set up his own company in 1970 and continued to use the original Traverse facilities. The Traverse Workshop Company eventually evolved into Joint Stock (1974) and Stafford-Clark eventually became artistic director of the Royal Court (1979).

The interview with Professor Chambers began with a discussion of the influence of the Group Theatre visit to Britain and of Clifford Odets and other American playwrights during the

1930s on the formation of Unity Theatre. The interview then progressed to a discussion of the impact of the Off Off Broadway movement on the founding of the Other Place and Warehouse spaces at the RSC as well as the Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court. It was Professor Chambers' contention that the Off Off Broadway movement had a direct effect on the creation of these venues. We then discussed Peter Brook's production of *US* in 1966 and the RSC's visit to New York in 1971. The RSC was officially in New York to perform Peter Brook's famous production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Within the company there was great interest, according to Professor Chambers, in meeting with Ellen Stewart and working with La MaMa.

During his time as literary manager of the Royal Shakespeare Company (1981 – 1997) Chambers worked with more than eighty playwrights. Before this, in 1973, he was responsible for bringing Robert Patrick's play *Kennedy's Children* (which started its production life at Cafe Cino in the heart of Off Off Broadway) to Britain. *Kennedy's Children* was later produced in London at the King's Head and Arts Theatre and then on Broadway. Chambers is the author of *The Story of Unity Theatre* (1989) and was also a key contributor to *Dreams and Deconstructions* (1980) which is considered to be one of the most important books on the alternative theatre movement in Britain.

In May 2011 I went to Edinburgh and spent three days in the Richard Demarco Archive and one day visiting the Traverse Theatre and sites associated with its history. I audio-recorded a two hour and thirty-five minute interview with Professor Richard Demarco C.B.E. on 9 May 2011. The Demarco Archive contains original documents, posters and photographs detailing the genesis of the Traverse Theatre as well as the Edinburgh Fringe. Richard Demarco was co-founder with Jim Haynes of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in 1963 and served as its Vice-Chairman from 1963 to 1967. During the interview Prof. Demarco described how the Traverse Theatre was intended as a permanent year-round home for the kind of experimental

work that was taking place during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for three weeks in August every year.

Professor Demarco described how Ellen Stewart of La MaMa was in communication with him during the early months of the Traverse Theatre and was an important inspirational force in sustaining what was then an uncertain initiative. He also described the comparable material basis on which both the Traverse and La MaMa survived in the early years. In the case of the Traverse it was Demarco himself, according to his evidence in interview, who, with others, helped to sustain the venture out of his own pocket, in his case from his wages as a teacher and from the proceeds from of his art work which was put on display and on sale in the Traverse cafe. In the case of La MaMa Ellen Stewart fulfilled precisely the same function, supporting the theatre through her work as a fashion designer. Demarco was also important to British avant-garde theatre apart from his work with Haynes and was responsible for bringing Tadeusz Kantor and his company Cricot 2 to Britain for the first time in 1972.

On 5 June 2011 I tape recorded an hour and fifteen minute interview with the late Charles Marowitz (1932-2014) at his home in Malibu, California. We discussed his artistic directorship of the Open Space theatre in London which he founded with Thelma Holt in 1968. We discussed American playwrights whose work was introduced to the British theatre through the Open Space, including Mike Weller, John Guare and Sam Shepard. We discussed his role in the notorious 'Happening' at the 1963 Edinburgh Drama conference and subsequent controversies in which he was involved during his London period.

On 5 August 2011 I tape recorded a one hour interview with Jim Haynes in London. The interview with Jim Haynes began with a general overview of his life and career. We discussed the difference between working in Britain and France and the origins of the Traverse. We further discussed Haynes's long standing friendship with Ellen Stewart and he

pointed out that the two of them had been born in Louisiana less than fifty miles apart (though my follow-up research drew attention to the fact their births were separated in time by fourteen years, a clear example of the way in which interview material should not be taken at face value, but needs to be triangulated by later confirmatory research). Frustration with the costs associated with the London Traverse season led Haynes to found the Arts Lab in a warehouse on Drury Lane in 1967. We also discussed how *Time Out* grew out of the *International Times* as well as his friendship and collaboration with Kenneth Tynan.

I met with Nancy Meckler at her home in North London on January 14th, 22nd and April 15th 2012. I spent several hours going through her personal archive which is quite extensive and includes original documents from Freehold's productions as well as production images and a large number of newspaper articles and journal articles tracing the life and work of the Freehold company. We discussed her work with the La MaMa Plexus in New York and how she came to live and work in Britain. She described seeing *Dionysus in 69* in New York and noted the influence of Grotowski and the Living Theatre on her work. We discussed the origins of Freehold and her longstanding collaboration with Sam Shepard.

Having completed these interviews I then devised the following outline for the thesis:

### *Chapter One: Introduction*

In examining the alternative theatre movement previous commentators have not addressed the concurrent effect of American theatre and performance on radical and conventional British theatre during the time period of their analysis. This study seeks to address that gap and asks how American experimental theatre practices intersect and interact mutually with issues of performance efficacy with respect to the advent of an important phase in the alternative theatre movement in Britain. Chapter One introduces the thesis topic and places it within the context of contemporaneous theoretical movements and changes in broader

culture. In addition, indicators of American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain 1956-1980 are identified and discussed.

### *Chapter Two: Methodology*

This chapter provides a map of the thesis so that readers can more easily navigate each section. It also provides a methodology, and a set of claims about substantive and theoretical issues at the core of the document's argument.

### *Chapter Three: Background 1936 –1956*

The first production at Unity Theatre was a double bill of American plays which opened on 17 April 1936 at the Britannia Street Theatre in London. The plays were *Private Hicks* written in 1935 by Albert Maltz and *Waiting for Lefty* also written in 1935 by Clifford Odets. The members of Unity obtained their scripts for these plays from an American magazine called *New Theater*. The Roosevelt government initiated the Federal Theatre Project in 1935 and many of the original productions the London Unity Theatre produced were originally developed as a consequence of the Federal Theatre Project in the United States and the Living Newspaper (Chambers 1989:77).

Between 1942 and 1945 three million Americans passed through Great Britain. At one point before the D-Day invasion Americans made up six-percent of the resident population of Great Britain (Reynolds 1995: 431-433). American influence on British cultural institutions was substantial and long lasting. Following the war a new generation of 'serious' American drama started to enter Britain such as the 1949 London premiere of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. In 1956 the New Watergate Theatre Club presented a season including *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* (Williams), *Tea & Sympathy* (Anderson) and *A View From the Bridge* (Miller) to challenge the system of theatre censorship in Britain. Unlike plays

written in the UK these plays were not written under the stricture of satisfying the British licensing provision.

#### *Chapter Four: American Groups and Alternative Theatre Practices*

During the period 1956 to 1980 the group as opposed to the individual became the focus of many organisations associated with what came to be known as alternative society. The rise of the commune movement in the 1960s was an example of this trend which was also reflected in the structure of alternative theatre organisations that emerged during this time period. It was demonstrated in their working process and in the performance pieces which they produced. The idea of a collective creation free of conventional and traditional hierarchical structures became the basis for a new method of conceiving and developing theatre and performance.

To a certain degree this was a reaction to what was perceived as a fragmentation within established society and established theatre, fragmentation perceived to be based on competition and arbitrary concerns (Shank 1972: 3). A focus on group living and group activities, including theatre, was based on the premise that individuals are capable of cooperation and that it is possible to establish a sense of wholeness through collective creation. The most important pioneering groups were the Living Theatre (1946), Cafe La MaMa (1961), the Open Theatre (1963), the Bread and Puppet Theatre (1963), Richard Schechner's Performance Group (1968), the Manhattan Project (1968), the Theatre of the Ridiculous (1965) and the San Francisco Mime Troupe (1959). There were also parallel UK examples, for example the foundation of the Traverse Workshop Company in 1970, under the influence of La MaMa, who lived communally in the old Traverse James Court building in their first years of operation.

#### *Chapter Five: Jim Haynes*

Jim Haynes arrived in the UK from Louisiana in 1956 and became an instrumental figure in the founding of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in 1963. In 1967 he started the Arts Lab on Drury Lane. These experimental venues were immensely important catalysts for change and innovation on both technical and aesthetic levels. During the same year the Traverse opened, Jim Haynes, John Calder and Kenneth Tynan organised the Edinburgh Drama Conference during which one hundred and twenty of the most renowned playwrights, directors and actors converged on Edinburgh. Attendees included Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, Laurence Olivier, Peter Brook and Edward Albee. The conference may be seen as marking the point when the experimental practices of the Edinburgh Fringe began to proliferate more widely to the rest of the UK. Haynes started the *International Times* on 14 October 1966 at The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, London (Haynes 1984). Ten years after the founding of the original Drury Lane Arts Lab in 1967, 170 multimedia communities based Arts Labs were scattered throughout Great Britain (Lane 1978: 152).

#### *Chapter Six: Charles Marowitz*

Charles Marowitz arrived in the UK in the summer of 1956. During 1963/64 Charles Marowitz and Peter Brook put Artaud's theories into practice with the Royal Shakespeare Company Experimental Group/Theatre of Cruelty at L.A.M.D.A. This was the first full-fledged experimental project of its kind in Britain and injected Artaud's ideas into contemporaneous theatre practice. Marowitz directed the 1966/67 production of Joe Orton's *Loot* which received the Evening Standard Award for Best Play of the Year. In 1968 Marowitz started the Open Space Theatre on Tottenham Court Road in collaboration with Thelma Holt (Marowitz 1990). The Open Space introduced many important American writers to the British Theatre including Sam Shepard, Mike Weller and John Guare. The Open Space also included British writers such as Howard Barker. In many respects the Open Space was an Off Off Broadway Theatre based in London. It hosted an American season of plays in

1969 and continued to premiere many more American plays. The Open Space was known for environmental pieces, Shakespeare collages and premieres of new writing, including the world premiere of *The Four Little Girls* by Pablo Picasso (Schiele 2005).

#### *Chapter Seven: Nancy Meckler*

Nancy Meckler arrived in London in April 1968 after working at the La MaMa Plexus in New York. Nancy Meckler and her company, Freehold, were pioneers in using the body rather than words as the primary means of expression (Craig 1980: 106-107). Freehold would help to introduce ‘physical theatre’ to the British theatrical landscape. Meckler’s style of theatre was based on the most vital concept evolved by the American avant-garde groups of the 1950s and 1960s: the body as a supersensitive instrument of expression. Meckler’s style of theatre was a direct attack on the most ubiquitous stage convention in the western tradition—namely, drama as literature. For her and the company she created the body had to bear the main burden of theatrical expression: the text was often viewed as a disguised tool of repression (Ansorge 1975: 26). Freehold’s most successful work was an anti-war adaptation of *Antigone* (1969-70). It marked a shift away from purely literary reinterpretation and involved physical gymnastics and an orientation based on the impetus provided by the Peace Movement in America (Craig 1980: 106). Meckler was co-director of Shared Experience from 1987 until it disbanded in 2013. She continues to work regularly with the RSC.

#### *Chapter Eight: Ed Berman*

Ed Berman and his company Inter-Action were extremely influential in pioneering unconventional modes of community performance in unconventional locations for non-traditional theatre going audiences. Berman first came to England from Harvard University in 1962 as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. He began as a playwright and in 1968 started the first permanent lunchtime theatre in the UK. Over the next decade Inter-Action would be



responsible for an extremely prolific range of community arts and professional theatre activities in dozens of venues. This included the activities of the British American Repertory Company. Berman's company had the express aim of interweaving community work with professional theatre activities. Inter-Action had a charitable framework and its workers engaged in a communal living arrangement (Itzin 1980: 51-59). During the 1970s extremely important experimental theatre groups such as the Women's Theatre Group, Monstrous Regiment and Gay Sweatshop emerged out of, or were greatly influenced by, identity- and community-based seasons of plays produced by Ed Berman at the Almost Free Theatre.

### *Chapter Nine: Conclusion*

American influence on the alternative theatre in Britain 1956-1980 was substantial and was also to an extent mutual. This chapter will draw conclusions and detail the underlying reasons why this phenomenon took place. It will also identify and detail the defining characteristics of American influence during this period, with respect to subject matter, performance efficacies and cultural shift. The thesis endeavours to demonstrate that there was a discernible pattern of American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain 1956 to 1980, which, while it has been recognised by others, has not been fully explored and analysed.

### Chapter Three: Background 1936-1956

The relationship between Britain and America is closer than ever. Since Churchill the relationship between the two countries has been described as a ‘special relationship’. Cultural, political and military links are expressed globally from Hollywood to Afghanistan. Britain looks to America for trends and values and vice versa. The difficulty of translating plays is also rendered unnecessary because both nations are English speaking. America has also been a dominant force in world cinema since the end of World War I (Hollywood) which means that British children grow up learning a great deal about American culture and history. All of this is compounded by the British economic interdependence on the United States as demonstrated by the recent recession which started in America but soon had a knock-on effect in Britain. The recent economic recovery has also followed this pattern.

In his *Guardian* newspaper column, Michael Billington has raised the question of why, as he sees it, British theatres today have become so ‘troublingly’ dependent on American productions.

I saw four American plays on successive nights last week – Tracy Letts’s *August: Osage County*; Neil LaBute’s *In A Dark Dark House*; Tarell Alvin McCraney’s *Wig Out!*; and William Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life*. But, while I would count the Steppenwolf production of the Letts play among the great experiences of the year and enjoyed the Saroyan, such a transatlantic deluge left me thinking about the defining qualities of American drama and our unquestioning cultural enslavement to the United States. (Michael Billington, ‘United Stages of America’, *Guardian*, 3 December 2008)

In order to understand how the ‘special relationship’ as re-defined by Michael Billington developed and in particular how changes in British culture relate to this study we will now examine the origins of American cultural and ideological transactions with British alternative

theatre. As such the purpose of this chapter is to establish a background context and identify certain patterns which would later become characteristic of American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain 1956-1980. This study dates the beginning of American influence on the alternative theatre in Britain to the 1936 British premiere of *Waiting for Lefty* and the performance efficacy brought to bear through participatory performance practices.

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This chapter also seeks to demonstrate that theatre has often been used to define or challenge national values and the notion of the nation. Particularly at times of national crisis the theatre has served as a political and ideological tool to help reconfigure the nation. Rather than focusing on standard hegemonic forms of nationalism, this chapter will concentrate on counter-hegemonic discourses in Britain and America between 1936 and 1956. The chapter analyses groups that formulated a positive identity for marginalised or oppressed communities in Britain and America, and that posited an identity for the particular nation that privileged rather than minimised the position of these groups.

In the historical development of the nation state various forms of cultural expression have been instrumental in helping to construct notions of national identity. Many works on cultural nationalism have analysed this process such as, perhaps most prominently in the last three decades, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, recently revised in 2006. However, generally, they have undervalued the role of theatre. This study attempts to widen the discussion by demonstrating the importance of drama and theatrical performance in having contributed to and in continuing to influence the process of representing and challenging notions of national identity.

The theatre can serve as a microcosm of the national community, passing judgment on images of itself. In this context influences such as that of American theatre and theatre practitioners on British theatre form part of a key cultural contestation of theatrical national identity and the theatre of particular communities within the nation. Likewise certain groups will confront the homogenous image represented by the dominant group by asserting a more pluralistic or counter-hegemonic identity. The contribution of this thesis to this debate is in the way in which the impact of international influences is explored in the development of theatre within the context of a specific national theatrical culture.

In order to understand a phenomenon it is necessary to examine its roots. As in other countries, the concept of the nation in America has responded to social change and times of crisis. Theatre and other media have contributed to the changing discourse about national values and national identity (Mason and Gainor, eds. 1999: 9). Unlike the nations of Europe that could claim the organic development of a national spirit through a common history, folklore, literature, ethnicity and language, America's common identity needed to be more artificially constructed because of its diversity of ethnicities, religions, languages and customs. Despite severe social prejudice, a hierarchical social structure and legalised forms of social discrimination, some of the factors that were represented as uniting the country were

the English language, Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, and a common dream of prosperity founded on notions of liberty, equality and free enterprise.

The image of America as a land of opportunity for the hard-working individual applied to immigrants and citizens alike and fostered the concept of a national community of individuals who could all prosper. Despite widespread anti-Catholicism, Jim Crow laws, the confinement to reservations of Native Americans, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and other forms of ethnic and religious discrimination, the image of a national homogenous population of white Protestants persisted and was reinforced by the metaphor of a national melting pot in which all the diverse elements could end up emulating the white Protestant archetype (Meserve 1965: 73). Despite cultural pressures toward homogeneity, American theatre has seen various marginalised and excluded groups (Women, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Gays and Lesbians) use theatre to reverse the stereotypical images conveyed by the mainstream theatre and other media.

Historically speaking the Armoury Show of 1913 which toured New York, Chicago and Boston was the first major exhibition of 'modern art' in the United States and served as a starting point for the development of distinctive American artwork. In the United States during the 1920s and 1930s the avant-garde in art was associated with Left-wing political movements and the work produced was generally politically engaged and highly accessible. Black Mountain College in North Carolina was established in 1933 as an experimental institution which brought together members of the Bauhaus and European artists fleeing the Nazis as well as such figures as Eric Bentley, William and Elaine de Kooning, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham and Arthur Penn. Many artists taught at Black Mountain College during the summer in exchange for room and board and the opportunity to experiment. Work produced at Black Mountain College such as John Cage's *4'33*, or the abstract expressionism of the de Koonings, would go on to influence alternative theatre

practices in America, as evidence in the work of the Living Theatre and the Happenings of Allan Kaprow.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, following the American entry into World War II three million Americans passed through Great Britain between 1942 and 1945. It was the largest ever encounter between Americans and the British people in history. At one point before the D-Day invasion Americans made up six percent of the resident population of Great Britain (Reynolds 1995: 431- 433). By the end of World War II the joint Gross Domestic Product of Europe had fallen by about twenty-five percent, while the Gross National Product of the United States had risen during the war years by over fifty percent in real terms (Clarke 2008: xiv). Britain was saddled with enormous war debt while America avoided any damage to its mainland. Britain survived the war but the cost would ultimately lead to the loss of empire (Clarke 2008: 508-512). Britain's war debts were not fully repaid to the United States and Canada until the year 2006. The Cold War solidified the current arrangement of US military bases scattered throughout the UK.

As has already been noted, as late as the 1920s Britain controlled a quarter of the world's territory and a quarter of its total population. However, primarily as a consequence of changes necessitated by or arising from World War II, the British Empire was to a large extent dismantled. During the post-war period there was also a shift of power and influence both in politics and culture to the United States. These changes can be formally dated from the Quebec conference in September 1944 which involved Churchill, Roosevelt and other war time allies as they began to plan for a post-war scenario. For the British this would ultimately involve the loss of India and Palestine. The Commonwealth as it exists today was formulated in 1949 as a free association of equal and independent countries, in effect to replace the Empire, though the process of decolonisation took two more decades to be fulfilled (Clarke 2008: 505).

There is general agreement that the American Theatre really came of age only after World War I. At that time a group of serious and exciting new writers emerged who won the respect of critics and audiences alike. Among these writers were Maxwell Anderson, Elmer Rice and most notably Eugene O'Neill who introduced the naturalism and symbolism of Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov to the American theatre. Works such as *Anna Christie* (1921) by Eugene O'Neill and *Street Scene* (1929) by Elmer Rice generated an interest in American theatre abroad. There were also notable works by American composers such as George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Richard Rogers.

In the first decade following World War II American theatrical practice began to have a considerable impact on British theatre. In his book *Mid-Century Drama* (1962) the British theatre historian Laurence Kitchen described American theatre as the most powerful foreign influence on the London stage during the ten years following the end of the war. The American influence he describes is outlined in a chapter called *The Potent Intruder* which begins with a review of Marowitz's 1958 production of Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* in the upstairs theatre at the British Drama League. American dramatists known prior to World War II whose works continued to be performed in London after the war included Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, Maxwell Anderson, Philip Barry, Sidney Kingsley and William Saroyan. Several writers of comedies and lighter entertainments belonging to the same generation also had plays presented in the West End in the post-war period.

In 1948 a new generation of 'serious' American drama started to flow into Britain with the London premiere of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and in 1949 with the British premiere of Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In the first instance these American works in Britain were highly provocative and it is worthwhile to examine their reception at the time. *The Glass Menagerie* starring Helen Hayes

in her London debut opened at the Haymarket Theatre on July 28, 1948. *A Streetcar Named Desire* with Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois and directed by her husband Sir Laurence Olivier opened at the Aldwych Theatre in late 1949. Both Helen Hayes and Vivien Leigh won rave reviews for their acting but the plays themselves were both harshly attacked. *The Glass Menagerie* closed after a modest run and initially failed to attract a large audience.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* managed to overcome the sensational advanced notoriety and an outpouring of disgust and widespread indignation upon its West End opening and achieved a commercially successful run. After the opening performance the critical reaction in the British press was sharply divided. *The Times* for example mentioned Vivien Leigh's performance as being 'impressive for its delicately insistent suggestion of a mind with a slowly loosening hold on reason'. Others however reacted to the play with accusations of indecency and were disconcerted by the frank depiction of Blanche's history and her disintegration into madness. Baroness Ravensdale speaking for the Public Morality Council stated 'The play is thoroughly indecent and we should be ashamed that children and servants are allowed to sit in the theatre and see it.' Princess Alice cancelled plans to see the production stating that it was 'not the kind of entertainment she would enjoy.' (Shellard 1999: 25)

Tennessee Williams resisted the imposition of any cuts and fought to preserve the integrity of his play. He warned that he would refuse to yield to any censorship imposed by the Lord Chamberlain. Generally, however, the influential critics thought the production was unworthy of its star and director. There was even an effort to have the play withdrawn because of elements considered obscene. While the first London production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* had a good run and acquainted the British public with Tennessee Williams's most famous work it did not do much at the time to enhance his reputation with British theatre critics who generally failed to recognise Williams as a playwright of the first order.



In 1956 Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and *A View from the Bridge* re-opened in London and both plays made an impact on the British theatrical landscape. *The Crucible* first generated excitement in British theatre circles in 1954 when it was presented by the Bristol Old Vic Company at the Theatre Royal Bristol. The leading British theatre critics, representing the large daily newspapers and weekly periodicals, reviewed the production and in general found it to be an important and provocative work. In London *The Crucible* opened on April 9, 1956 at the Royal Court and was presented by the English Stage Company during its historic first season. The following month this newly formed theatre group premiered John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on May 8, 1956. While Miller's play was well received critically it was intended as only one of a series of plays and as a consequence ran for only thirty-six performances.

British theatre was influenced, beside the newer playwrights, by other works by members of the pre-World War II generation of American playwrights produced in London including revivals: in 1952 *Montserrat* Hellman's rendering of the French play opened at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith and ran for thirty-nine performances but did not transfer to the West End. Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* was revived at the Arts Theatre in 1956.

Maxwell Anderson's dramatic adaptation of *The Bad Seed* in 1955 had a run of 196 performances. In 1954 *The Matchmaker* by Thornton Wilder opened at the Haymarket Theatre and ran for 275 performances. Ten years later it was transformed into a musical *Hello Dolly* which was a tremendous hit. Popular playwrights who belonged to an older generation had some spectacular successes as well as disastrous failures. Paul Osborne's original play *Mornings at Seven* was first staged in New York in 1939 and had its London premiere in 1953 and ran for forty-six performances and received a lukewarm critical response.

Additional American playwrights who became well known during the 1950s and had works produced in Britain included Robert Anderson, William Gibson, Paddy Chayefsky, Frank

Gilroy and Gore Vidal. Jean Kerr, Ira Levin, Liam O'Brien, John Patrick, Neil Simon, Samuel Taylor and the team of Joseph Fields and Peter DeVries all had successes. John Patrick's *The Teahouse of the August Moon* ranked first in the number of performances within this group. The play opened at Her Majesty's Theatre on April 22, 1954 and closed on August 11, 1956 after 954 performances.

Throughout the 1950s, then, the flow of American works to London continued to expand in the number and variety of productions. Miller and Williams wrote plays that made them the leading American playwrights of their generation. It was against this background and in this context that the next stage of American influence, the import of American experimental theatre and performance practices, developed. That stage, which is the focus of this study, coalesced with the cultural revolution of the 1960s and contributed to an important new phase in the history of the alternative theatre movement in Britain.

The success of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 has been seen by many as the crucial event that determined the re-orientation of British theatre in the late fifties, but there were other less visible milestones on the journey from stilted drawing-room drama to more diverse theatrical genres. The opening up of the London stage after the war to creative contact with New York and Paris, for example, was an event every bit as important for the evolution of twentieth-century English drama as the advent of Osborne, Wesker and the other 'new wave' dramatists (Shellard, 1999:17).

Having outlined this general context, this chapter will now examine and trace two individual elements of American influence on theatrical practices in Britain before and after World War II.

### *Unity Theatre*

The story of Unity Theatre is of critical importance in understanding the history of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. It is a story of British innovation based to some extent on a trans-Atlantic transmission of theatrical practices to British theatre during the 1930's. The first plays produced by Unity Theatre were originally from the Group Theatre in New York. Much like the Unity Theatre phenomenon in Scotland and England, Left-leaning theatres in the United States such as the Group Theatre (1931-1941) were a part of a national infrastructure for performing plays around the country with the intention of increasing class solidarity and participation in a popular front. These theatres were created for the explicit purpose of changing society through performance.

In 1935 the Roosevelt government initiated the Federal Theatre Project, which absorbed some of the radicalism of this movement, and at the same time contained it within a government funded institution. Many of the plays as well as innovative practices which the Unity Theatre later produced and adopted were first developed by the Group Theatre or with the support of the Federal Theatre Project in the United States (Chambers, 1989: 77). The Group Theatre was dedicated to eliminating what it perceived as the artificiality of contemporaneous Broadway productions, and to influencing social issues of the day through theatre. In the economic climate of the 1930s meanwhile the number of unemployed people in the United States increased dramatically and those who made their living from the theatre were no less affected by the Great Depression. Just like other skilled but unemployed workers theatre professionals were eligible for help from volunteer organisations as well as state and federal relief programs. On April 8, 1935 the United States Congress created the Works Progress Administration designed to foster a new approach to the problem of mass unemployment. Under the guidelines of the W.P.A. healthy and able bodied persons were to be taken off of the relief programmes of individual states and offered work within their own skills and trades.

The W.P.A. insisted that workers in the arts including painters, musicians, writers and actors were as deserving of federal support as workers with other skills and during a National Theatre Conference at the University of Iowa in the summer of 1935 the W.P.A. announced the creation of a 'free, adult, uncensored' federal theatre (O'Connor and Brown 1980: 10). The Federal Theatre Project emerged as part of a division of the W.P.A. along with the Federal Music Project, Federal Art Project and Federal Writers Project. Together these groups combined to employ over 40,000 artists by the end of 1935. The Federal Theatre Project existed from 1935 to 1939 and was most active in New York although it had units in forty states.

The American contribution to Unity Theatre, however, consisted primarily in providing a repertoire of material to get started with, although the interest continued, and also the important influence of the Living Newspaper which in the United States grew out of the Federal Theatre Project. The Federal Theatre Project is perhaps best remembered for the Living Newspaper the most popular of which were, *Triple-A Ploughed Under* (1936) about the government's farm subsidy programme, *Power* (1937) about rural electrification and flood control and *One Third of a Nation* (1938) about slum housing. In 1943 Unity revived the Living Newspaper *One Third of a Nation* in London (Chambers 1989: 405). The title comes from Franklin D. Roosevelt's second inaugural address referring to those Americans who were ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-nourished.

The Living Newspaper was a new dramatic form influenced by agitprop and was intended as a kind of documentary that informed its audience of the nature and origin of social problems and then called upon its audience to take specific action. The Living Newspaper brought together unemployed newspaper workers and theatre artists. Originally the Living Newspaper unit in New York attempted to produce a Living Newspaper about the Ethiopian war in 1936 but the White House directly intervened and cancelled the production (O'Connor and Brown

1980: 10). The reason it was cancelled was the Roosevelt administration thought that the Living Newspaper could potentially antagonise the government of Fascist Italy. This cancellation clearly highlights the potential efficacy of this form of performance practice.

Then there was a successful Living Newspaper called *Triple-A Ploughed Under* which reported on recent events which had affected farmers as well as food prices with reference to a recent milk strike in 1932. The production incorporated projections, music, masks, spotlights, loudspeakers and actors planted in the audience all of which was intended to shock the audience into organised social action. The New York production was directed by Joseph Losey and H. Gordon Graham and ran for eighty-five performances before being subsequently produced again in Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles and Milwaukee. Unity Theatre in Britain forged direct links with Living Newspaper originators in America and then produced several indigenous British Living Newspapers. Arthur Arent the original author of *Triple A Plowed Under* visited Unity and shared his experiences and Andre van Gysegem an important Unity director who worked with Paul Robeson in Britain and also visited America to observe Living Newspapers.

Living Newspaper performances in Britain and America introduced topical subject matter and helped to form class consciousness. The performances changed the relations of individual audience members to the dramatic performance. There was an ideological transaction brought to bear through both form and content. Although theatrical developments in the period 1930-1956 occurred before the main focus of this study, innovations during the period nonetheless marks the origin of American influence on alternative theatre in Britain from 1956-1980 and set in motion certain patterns in terms of performance practices, repertoire and public subsidy which would influence later developments, which will be detailed further in the following chapters.

In the autumn of 1934 members of the New Theatre League, meantime, which was a confederation of Left leaning political theatre groups, visited a meeting of the Group Theatre's communist cell and asked them to contribute a short play for one of their regularly scheduled Sunday theatrical events. Among the members of the communist cell were Elia Kazan and Clifford Odets and the members of the cell agreed to collaborate on a play about a strike with each actor responsible for writing one scene of the play. However as the January deadline for the performance piece neared none of the actors in the group had taken the time to write their individual scene. Because of this Clifford Odets isolated himself for three nights and wrote *Waiting for Lefty* (Clurman 1983: 141).

*Waiting for Lefty* was first performed on 6 January 1935 as part of the New Theatre League's theatrical bill at the Civic Repertory Theatre on Fourteenth Street in New York City and later transferred to Broadway. At the end of the play the audience rises to their feet with the actors and joins them on stage in calling for a strike. It was an electrifying and ground breaking moment in the history of participatory performance practice which would become an important characteristic of the alternative theatre movement. Performance efficacy is generated in such a context because performance practices have the potential to change the direction of a given community.

The first formal production at Unity was a double bill which opened on 17 April 1936 at the Britannia Street Theatre in London. The plays were *Waiting for Lefty* written in 1935 by Clifford Odets and *Private Hicks* also written in 1935 by Albert Maltz. *Waiting for Lefty* became emblematic of Unity itself and Unity staged the play over 300 times for more than 40,000 people (Chambers 1989: 65) even before the outbreak of World War II. The potential for performance efficacy was elevated from the micro level of an individual performance to a macro level of potential influence on British society and culture. Another early success for

Unity was the British premiere of *Bury the Dead* (1936) by Irwin Shaw about common soldiers who are often forced to fight in conflicts which are not their own.

The London Unity Theatre would produce a number of Odets's plays including *Waiting for Lefty* (which was awarded second place in a national competition hosted by the British Drama League in 1940), *I Can't Sleep, Till the Day I Die*, *Awake and Sing* and *Golden Boy*. The Glasgow Unity Theatre which was formed in 1941 produced Odets's *Awake and Sing* as their opening production and two more of Odets's plays including *Golden Boy* and *Till the Day I Die* (Chambers 1989: 245). Although not Unity productions Odets's *Awake in Sing* was revived in London in 1950 and he had a substantial hit in *Winter Journey* during 1952. Additionally there was a modest run of the *Big Knife* in 1954.

The members of Unity obtained their scripts for these plays primarily from an American magazine called *New Theater*. In the first instance American playwrights were used as opposed to those from Germany or the Soviet Union because of a common language. In fact the members of the American Group Theatre who in 1937 were in London for a West End production of Odets's *Golden Boy* met and interacted with the Unity Theatre. They attended both the opening night and a subsequent performance of *Plant in the Sun* by Group Theatre writer Ben Bengal with Paul Robeson in the lead role. Members of Unity met with Elia Kazan, Harold Clurman, Lee J. Cobb, Stella Adler and Odets himself who spoke from the Unity stage (Chambers 1989: 158). The introduction of American methods derived from Stanislavski would in time change British Theatre, particularly with regard to attitudes towards improvisation. The members of the Group Theatre suggested that Unity should establish a professional wing which they did within six months and the Group Theatre members also attended a meeting in the House of Commons along with Robeson in 1938 in support of an appeal for funds by a group of MPs on behalf of Unity.

An equally proud moment came when members of the internationally famous American Group Theatre – the main inspiration for many in the British left-wing theatre movement – congratulated Unity on its production of *Plant in the Sun* and returned to see it twice. The Group Theatre represented the best of American drama, and with writers such as Clifford Odets, Irwin Shaw, Albert Maltz and Ben Bengal, had been the main source of Unity's repertoire (Chambers 1989: 158).

In London, Robeson had earned acclaim at the Savoy Theatre in 1930 as probably the first black actor in the twentieth century to play the role of Othello in Britain. The African-American actor Ira Aldridge is considered to be the first black actor to play the role of Othello in London in 1833. Robeson, who sang at the opening of Unity Theatre, later returned in 1937 to play the lead role in the production of *Planet in the Sun*. The play is about a group of workers who organise a strike at a candy factory in New York following the management's ruthless tactics to prevent them from unionising.

In order to participate in the Unity production Robeson was willing to perform anonymously and for free and also turned down a lucrative starring role in a production of *The Sun Never Sets* at the Drury Lane Theatre in London's West End (Chambers 1989: 152). The production of *Plant in the Sun* was reviewed by over twenty publications in Britain and the opening night performance was attended by a group of MPs as well as the future first prime minister of India, Nehru, who was a personal friend of Robeson's. In this context the potential for performance efficacy to directly shape attitudes within the British political establishment, and thereby British society and culture, was acute. Following the opening night 400 new members joined Unity and in 1939 the production won a national competition sponsored by the British Drama League which was judged and announced by Tyrone Guthrie. Robeson would continue to serve as a member of the Unity Theatre general council (Chambers 1989: 151-159).



I turn now to cultural change as evidenced by alterations in censorship, alterations brought about by performance of American plays dealing with 'forbidden' topics. As this chapter considers the period 1936-1956 this preliminary phase of American influence on alternative theatre in Britain can be seen as culminating in 1956 with the New Watergate Theatre Club season of American plays at the Comedy Theatre. At the time it was unique for a club to produce a season of plays in a large West End theatre, particularly plays that all deal with homosexuality. Homosexuality was a criminal offence in Britain at the time and remained so until 1967.

#### *New Watergate Theatre Club at the Comedy Theatre*

During the 1950s American plays like *A View from the Bridge* (1955/6), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *Tea & Sympathy* (1953) challenged the system of theatre censorship in Britain. In 1956 the New Watergate Theatre Club produced a season involving these American plays at the Comedy Theatre in London's West End. All three dealt with the theme of homosexuality or what the Lord Chamberlain's readers previously referred to as 'the forbidden subject' (Tynan 2007: 38). Small theatres in Britain such as Unity and the New Watergate became clubs in order to circumvent the censor. As I have noted already, unlike plays written in the UK, these American plays were not created with the British licensing provision in mind. They were, moreover, written by highly visible award-winning Broadway playwrights and as such generated interest from producers, critics and the theatre-going public in Britain.

The season originally came about because Robert Anderson sent the eventual producer Anthony Field a copy of his play *Tea and Sympathy*. Field was interested in producing the play in London but it had to get passed by the Lord Chamberlain. The response from the Lord Chamberlain was, 'No, the whole basis of the play of *Tea and Sympathy* is not acceptable and

you can't do it in a public theatre' (Anthony Field, <http://sounds.bl.uk>: Theatre Archive Project: 2007: 2). Field was also interested in producing Tennessee Williams's play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* but again the Lord Chamberlain banned the play from public performance. Arthur Miller had also sent Field *A View From the Bridge* which again the Lord Chamberlain rejected.

Field knew a lady named Muriel Large who ran the Watergate Theatre Club, a small theatre club under the arches at Charing Cross Station. In London at that time there were between twenty and thirty small theatre clubs and they could do plays that did not have to be passed by the Lord Chamberlain. Large was looking for plays to produce and Field suggested the idea of doing the three American plays although they had large casts for a small club theatre and they would be expensive because of the American royalties. After reading the plays Large suggested transferring the Watergate Club into the Comedy Theatre although no one had ever run an 850-seat West End theatre as a club. They discussed the idea with a number of people including Hugh (Binkie) Beaumont, as well as Field's boss at the time Harold Wingate. Binkie Beaumont was a ubiquitous West End manager and producer who ran the company H.M. Tennent and Harold Wingate was a West End producer who was responsible for the Comedy Theatre. They then decided to take a chance and branded the enterprise the New Watergate Theatre Club at the Comedy Theatre.

During the season Tennent and Wingate had to be very strict and people had to first buy a membership for a pound. People could then buy tickets after they had been a member of the club for twenty-four hours and bring up to three guests. The police were very vigilant and ensured that the box office was complying with the club membership laws. If the box office had not, the club would have been shut down immediately.

*A View from the Bridge* opened at the Comedy Theatre and was directed by Peter Brook. Miller actually rewrote the play for the London production changing the original one-act version previously staged in New York in 1955 into a full-length work. The British critics complained about aspects that struck them as sensational and sentimental. However, the production had a successful run of 220 performances. The main character Eddie Carbone harbours taboo incestuous feelings towards his wife's orphaned niece Catherine whom they have raised. It is also revealed that Eddie and his wife Beatrice have not slept together for several months. When his wife's cousins Rodolpho and Marco arrive from Italy illegally the attraction between Rodolpho and Catherine is perceived by Eddie as a threat. Rodolpho is blonde and sings opera and Eddie projects his homophobia onto him and tries to portray him as effeminate and sexually abnormal. When Eddie, in a rage, finds a post-coital Rodolpho and Catherine he grabs his niece and kisses her on the mouth. Rodolpho says that he wants to marry Catherine and Eddie, 'pins his arms, laughing, and suddenly kisses him' (*A View From the Bridge*, Miller 1956: 63). The moment is full of dramatic tension and it is this male kiss that would mean the play would be censored in Britain if it had not been performed under club conditions.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was a critical and commercial success in New York and received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1955. The play opened in London in 1956 and was directed by Peter Hall. Kim Stanley, an American star, played the role of Maggie but the play achieved only a moderately successful run of 132 performances. It is a play about 'Mendacity' people's self-deception as well as their everyday lying to other people. The character of Brick is in a state of spiritual disrepair precipitated by the apparent suicide of his close friend Skipper. In the second act, which is devoted primarily to Brick and Big Daddy, Brick finally tells his father that he is dying and Big Daddy forces Brick to acknowledge Skipper confessed his love in a phone conversation and Brick then hung up the phone. However it is

interesting just how little is actually said regarding the topic of homosexuality. Skipper is a spectre present through his very absence and haunts Brick and Maggie's lives and the action of the play but the topic of homosexuality was so provocative in British theatre at the time that the play could only be performed under club conditions although any reference to homosexuality is heavily veiled and is barely referred to.

*Tea and Sympathy* by Robert Anderson also made an impact as part of the 1956 season at the Comedy Theatre. The recurrent subject matter throughout Anderson's writing and one which links him with the work of William Inge was the topic of sexuality and marriage. Although Anderson at times used nonrepresentational techniques his usual form has been described as falling within the parameters of the well-made play. He is primarily remembered as a writer for Broadway where six of his plays were produced although two of his film scripts also received Academy Award nominations. *Tea and Sympathy* was Anderson's first Broadway play and originally opened on 30 September 1953 and ran for 712 performances. The production was widely celebrated for Elia Kazan's direction and performances by Deborah Kerr (later Ingrid Bergman) and John Kerr. In *Tea and Sympathy* an older married woman offers herself to an adolescent boy after he has been falsely accused of homosexuality and needs to be reassured in his accepted masculine gender role. However, it is actually the antagonist in the play who projects his guilty feelings over his own latent homosexuality on to the boy.

The New Watergate Theatre Club season attracted an enormous amount of media attention primarily because Arthur Miller came to London with Marilyn Monroe whom he had married earlier that year. The three plays each ran eight or nine months which was remarkable for a club theatre in the West End. The major papers including *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* acknowledged that these three plays were very important ones (Anthony Field, <http://sounds.bl.uk>: Theatre Archive Project: 2007: 2-4). The New Watergate Theatre Club

season also persuaded the Lord Chamberlain to drop opposition to the staging of plays about homosexuality (Chambers and Prior: 1987: 115). Opening this forbidden subject matter to theatrical experience and thus public discussion, at the individual and the social levels, did change British theatre practice and to some extent British society. These three plays would not have been censored because of their plots, but specifically because of their homosexual content and the New Watergate Theatre Club season is a great example of efficacy and social, cultural and political impact.

### *Conclusion*

British productions of American plays pushed the boundaries of acceptable subject matter and would lay the groundwork for future American influence on experimental theatre and performance practices which will be discussed in forthcoming chapters. Further, as this chapter has shown, there was a direct exchange of American performance practices and forms such as the Living Newspaper to Britain during this period. The interrelationship of space, stage, audience, actor and author affect the social and cultural efficacy of a given performance. With regard to this process, the democratising performance practices which were an inherent part of the Living Newspaper form and productions such as *Waiting for Lefty* empowered audiences in Britain and brought to bear new relationships with contemporaneous events challenging political, cultural and social attitudes. This along with theatrical representations of hitherto underrepresented communities in Britain challenged the status quo.

In summary the number and variety of American theatrical works produced in London from 1936 to 1956, including those by commercial and subsidised theatres, indicates an abiding interest in American theatre. Critics and audiences often shared this interest. Analysing the fortunes of these American works in Britain offers a perspective from which to view

American theatrical achievement and its influence on the British theatrical landscape during this period. Participatory performance practices would become a core characteristic of the Alternative Theatre movement in Britain. The trajectory of American influence on this performance practice in Britain can be traced to the inaugural April 1936 production of *Waiting for Lefty* at the London Unity Theatre.

We turn now to the theatre and performance practices of American alternative theatre groups during the 1950s and 1960s which were not based in Britain but did influence British alternative theatre.

#### Chapter Four: American Groups

During the 1950s, the white heterosexual male American exemplar was the dominant representation of American national identity in the media. The Hollywood Western was a ubiquitous movie genre in which white settlers would easily defeat 'savage' Indians played by actors with blue eyes. General Eisenhower became the President of the United States, and former soldiers now in their thirties, focused their energies on building American economic power. Against this backdrop counter-hegemonic voices emerged in the American theatre such as in Edward Albee's *The American Dream* (1961) where the character of the young man who describes himself as a 'clean cut, Midwest farm boy type' (Albee 1961: 31) and is recognised by the grandmother as 'the American dream', but has lost any sense of feeling or compassion and will do anything for money. Edward Albee's *The American Dream* was produced at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1961, directed by Peter Yates. From the late 1950s onward, marginalised groups challenged the dominant discourse through the Civil Rights movement, student protests, demonstrations against the Vietnam War and the widespread rejection of dominant cultural values.

During the period 1956 to 1980 the group, as opposed to the individual, became the focus of organisations associated with what came to be known as alternative society. This trend was reflected in the structure of alternative theatre organisations that emerged during this period. It was demonstrated in both their working processes and in the performance pieces they produced. The idea of a collective creation free of conventional and traditional hierarchical structures became the basis for a new method of conceiving and developing theatre and performance.

To a certain degree this was a reaction to what was perceived as fragmentation within established society and established theatre, fragmentation perceived to be based on

competition and arbitrary concerns such as success and careerism (Shank 1972: 3). The focus on group living and group activity, in theatre and social arrangements, was based on the value of co-operation and an attempt to establish a sense of wholeness through collective creation. The most important pioneering groups were the Living Theatre (1946), Cafe La MaMa (1961), the Open Theatre (1963), Bread and Puppet Theatre (1963/64), Richard Schechner's Performance Group (1968), The Manhattan Project (1970), The Play-House of the Ridiculous (1965) and the San Francisco Mime Troupe (1959).

Members of alternative theatre groups were not exclusively performers but people with broad creative responsibilities who made little distinction between working as a performer, director, designer or playwright. Members applied their creative energies collectively in making a performance piece. While some provided more leadership than others, ultimately the work produced was the result of collective expression and not the work of a fragmentary hierarchical process with individual artists working in isolation.

This chapter will detail and explore the impact on British theatre of the American-based groups which toured to Britain during the period 1956-1980. It begins with a general overview of the subject, then moves on to detailed description and analysis of the Living Theatre, Open Theatre, La MaMa and Bread and Puppet.

During the 1950's American plays played in London whereas during the 1960's US and British theatrical enterprise cohabited, so to speak, shared space, performed together, collaborated and lived on common ground. 'Influence' became a function of intermingling, exchange and collaboration, directly on certain productions, indirectly by imitation.

'Influence' became 'transmission.' The effects of American alternative theatre on the alternative theatre movement in Britain were of multiple types: substantive / thematic,



cultural / ideological, aesthetic / technical and also to a great extent political. Issues of identity operated in all four of these areas.

In effect alternative theatre deconstructed the canonical texts of conventional theatre. Notions of race, character, plot and act sequence eroded. The collective creative process created contingent, problematised and to some extent ephemeral productions which challenged actors and audiences to change their culture and society. Alternative theatre broadened the range of subject matter appropriate to and accessible by British theatre audiences. Alternative theatre in Britain and America broadened social discourse and enabled individuals, audiences and artistic institutions and culture at large to shift views of race, gender, ethnicity, difference and identity.

Accepted hegemonic identities shifted in response to challenges offered by alternative theatre. Ideologies of power shifted as well and identity became a function of variously composed groups' 'communities'. Individualism was contested as a socio-cultural value as well as a function of national identity. The mutual creation of text and performance revalued the group as a primary entity and collaboration as the expression of human ability.

Three essays, one from 1946, and two from 1967 theorised for literary-critical audiences what alternative theatre could accomplish in fact: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*; Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, and Jacques Derrida, essays from *Writing and Difference*. These works provided the intellectual grounding and impetus for many of the changes in approach to text and language evidenced in this study.

Improvisation was the principal technique employed in alternative theatre groups, used to incorporate members of the group into the process of working collectively and creatively (Shank 1972: 4). Through improvisations, work would be built on an initial conception of a

new piece, and in many cases the exercises themselves would be developed into the finished performance. Such was the case with the Open Theatre's performances of *The Serpent* (1967) and *Terminal* (1970-1971). Improvisational exercises were utilised by nearly all of American alternative theatre groups during this period, and this creative technique became a characteristic of the new theatre.

At the same time individual groups developed their own unique methods and exercises based on the specific requirements of a given performance piece. Groups could be distinguished from one another by the means of discovery they employed to develop an idea for a particular piece. For example the Open Theatre was interested in exploring the work of the actor for its own sake whereas the Living Theatre was not. Alternative theatre groups during this period tended to base the development of their work on exercises which allowed them to respond to or a social or political issue, a text or painting, an object, or material or from a script generated by someone working within the particular group. Groups were also distinguished by the circumstances of performance (contextuality) within a scenario and whether the scenario did or did not involve spectators.

During the summer of 1967 links with American experimental companies began to spark real change in the British theatrical landscape by introducing new and revolutionary theatre practices. As John Arden noted at the time:

The summer of 1967 ensured that London had become fully versed in a style of drama which was to characterise much of the city's experimental theatre-going in the next few years (Ansorge 1975: 22).

At the Edinburgh Festival in 1967 the La MaMa Company played four plays at Barry Halls. La MaMa received a lot of attention, especially for *Futz*. Its members met and relaxed at The Traverse (Porter, interview, 2011). The company then transferred to the Vaudeville Theatre in London's West End. During the summer of 1967 the Open Theatre under the direction of

Joseph Chaikin performed *America Hurrah* at the Royal Court Theatre. *America Hurrah: Three Views of the U.S.A.* was a trilogy by Jean-Claude van Itallie. It was necessary for the Royal Court to turn itself into a private club in order to stage the trilogy because the Lord Chamberlain would otherwise have censored the production from public view. In this instance the threat of censorship had the effect of providing free advertising and only served to generate more interest in the production. *America Hurrah* demonstrated how American life is conditioned by ritualistic conventions. At the end of the performance the actors did not emerge and there was no curtain call (van Itallie 1978:143). In doing this the actors challenged an accepted convention of performance even after the performance itself had concluded. This is indicative of an awareness of the potential efficacy of utilising all the ritualistic elements surrounding the performance event even by the act of negating some of them.

### *Living Theatre*

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the couple Judith Malina and Julian Beck (married 1948) set up the Living Theatre in New York in 1946. Over the next thirty years the Living Theatre came to epitomise rebellion against establishment authority and also rebellion against established theatrical conventions. The Living Theatre was originally devoted to poetic drama but during the 1950s became increasingly influenced by Brecht and Artaud as well as anarchist theory. In particular Malina, Beck and members of Living Theatre were attracted to the principle of 'drawing the line' which involved taking a stand on a moral point beyond which an individual can no longer be coerced by the power of the state (Tytell 1995: 47). For years the Living Theatre played to a relatively tiny number of people. Then, within a few weeks of the opening Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, on 15 July 1959, the Living Theatre achieved notoriety and acclaim. The play was about drug dealing, a risky subject, and the play incorporated the presentation of jazz as an integral feature of the production. Jazz and

the elements of jazz would also later become indicative of works created by British alternative theatre groups such as the People Show. With *The Connection* the theatre space itself was unexpected, challenging, even disorienting for audiences:

When you go to *The Connection* in New York you are aware, as you enter the building, of all the denial aspects of the evening. There is no proscenium – (illusion? Well, yes, insofar as the stage is arranged like a squalid room, but it is not like a set; it is more as though the theatre were an extension of the room) – there is no conventional playwrighting, no exposition, no development, no story, no characterisation, no construction and, above all, no tempo. This supreme artifice of the theatre – this one god, whom we all serve, whether in musicals or in melodramas or in the classics – that marvellous thing called pace – is there thrown right out the window. So, with this collection of negative values, you seem to have an evening as boring as life must seem to a young and reluctant devotee sitting on the banks of the Ganges. And yet, if you persevere you are rewarded – from the zero you get to the infinite. (Peter Brook 1987: 27)

*The Connection* toured to London and played at the Duke of York's in the West End in 1961, bringing to British audiences the experiences Peter Brook described.

Beck and Malina were self-defined radicals who created the Living Theatre to address current political issues. In March 1962 Beck attempted to organise a general strike for peace and participated in a sit-in at Times Square to protest at President Kennedy's resumption of nuclear testing. The police punctured Beck's lung. Joseph Chaikin, who was the lead actor in *The Connection*, was also arrested. The next Living Theatre production was *The Brig* (1964), set in a military prison.

The Internal Revenue Service closed down the Living Theatre during the production of *The Brig*, on 17 October 1963. In 1964, after its base was closed for tax-related reasons, the

Living Theatre left the United States and toured Europe until 1968. Between 1964 and 1968 the Living Theatre was in exile, travelling throughout Europe (Marwick 1998: 343). Their production of *Frankenstein* opened in Venice in September 1965 and led to the company's deportation from Italy. Despite such difficulties—perhaps in some measure because of them—the Living Theatre gained international notoriety and a large following especially among young people.

In 1968 the Living Theatre returned to the United States with a repertory of material which had been created during the period in exile. They first performed four pieces at Yale including *Frankenstein*. Malina and Beck then used the Brooklyn Academy of Music for an audience-involving performance described as 'like a modern Dionysian rite'. *Paradise Now* was perhaps the most extreme example of the Living Theatre's work. *Paradise Now* began with actors circulating among the audience confronting them and denouncing restrictions on their freedom and then openly defying those restrictions. The performance continued for another four or five hours. Actors roamed through the audience, smoking marijuana. First the actors and then some members of the audience tore off their clothes. Judith Malina led the audience out into the Brooklyn streets.

In 1969 the Living Theatre was in London again, based at the Roundhouse. The Roundhouse was originally a Victorian engine shed, located in Chalk Farm, London. The unique dimensions of the Roundhouse soon began to yield interesting artistic experimentation and often determined how work found definition within its cavernous spaces *Paradise Now* deliberately provoked the public into voicing their opposition to the performance itself and then overrode audience protest by shouting obscenities and even sometimes spitting on audience members. Ultimately the Living Theatre sought to move the audience to continue an anarchist revolution. Their aggressive behaviour towards their audiences combined with

anarchist politics brought the Living Theatre enormous notoriety. They challenged many long accepted theatrical conventions, as well as conventions of public behaviour.

In particular the Living Theatre posed a challenge to the concept of distinguishing the fictional from the real. The Living Theatre treated space and time as present reality and actors played themselves rather than characters. Actors wore their own clothes and the subject matter was largely drawn from political and social issues of the day. In many cases themes were elucidated through improvised confrontations with the audience rather than by performance of a static and predetermined text. *Paradise Now* was an example of alternative performance deliberately taken to an extreme.

In 1969 the Living Theatre performed four shows in London at the Roundhouse: *Paradise Now*, *Frankenstein*, *Mysteries* and *Antigone*. Before this the Living Theatre presented *The Connection* (1961) at the Duke of York's in London and *The Brig* (1963) at the Mermaid Theatre. In 1979 the Living Theatre returned to the Roundhouse and performed *Prometheus*. These productions embodied and exemplified many of the influences and effects that this chapter explores.

### *Open Theatre*

Joseph Chaikin began to work with the Living Theatre in 1959. He played roles in Jack Gelber's *The Connection* and in plays by Berthold Brecht, including *In the Jungle of the Cities* and *Man is Man*. He received an Obie award for his performance in *Man is Man* and later received a second Obie award for his role in Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*. His work on the Brecht plays generated a profound change in Chaikin's outlook as he thought it made clear the shortcomings of Method acting. In working with the Living Theatre he helped to develop experimental approaches to performance in response to and required by the unique

aspects of each production. Unlike the Becks, Chaikin was specifically interested in exploring the actor's craft for its own sake.

On 1 February 1963 seventeen actors and four writers met for the first time in an auditorium borrowed from the Living Theatre and formed the new Open Theatre (Bottoms 2004:170). When the Internal Revenue Service closed down the Living Theatre's premises and Living Theatre went into exile in Europe, Chaikin stayed behind to work with the new ensemble.

Chaikin focused on what he believed was essential for the theatre. Open Theatre productions began with work developed through the exploration of contemporaneous role playing theories and theatre games. Such work revolved around the idea of transformation and the constantly shifting reality in which the same performer is able to assume and discard different roles or identities, depending on the context. For Chaikin and the Open Theatre reality was treated not as fixed but as ever-changing. The intended implication was that individuals can reshape themselves and in turn reshape society itself. The work of the Open Theatre sought to reveal the fundamental moral and social patterns hidden beneath troubling contemporary events. Chaikin had been influenced by Erving Goffman's 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and believed in what he referred to as 'the setup'. This was a prescribed role of conventionally defined success dictated for the actor by the existing socio-political system. The Open Theatre workshop experiments had the intention of finding a viable alternative to the kind of emotional exhibitionism which Chaikin thought was intrinsic to the Method tradition and which he believed was used to manipulate the audience.

Through workshops and improvisations Open Theatre actors explored the potential of situations, scenarios and characters. The playwrights working with the Open Theatre would then select and shape those discoveries into a written script. One of the most emblematic and successful examples was *The Serpent* (1967) by Jean-Claude van Itallie in which

contemporaneous assassinations of important political figures during the 1960s are interwoven with the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Another successful Open Theatre collaboration was Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* which ridiculed the bureaucratic justifications for the war in Vietnam and was another collective creation which was a distinctive contribution to theatre of the period. In fact Chaikin employed many female directors and writers, including Megan Terry whose *Viet Rock* was first presented in the spring of 1966 at Cafe La MaMa and Barbara Garson's 1967 *Macbeth* adaptation, *MacBird*, which presented President Johnson as the murderer of John Kennedy.

The goals of the Open Theatre were to redefine the limits of the stage experience, or unfix them. To find ways of reaching each other and the audience. To encourage and inspire playwrights who work with us. To find ways of presenting plays and improvisational programs without the pressures of money, real estate and other commercial considerations which usurp creative energy. To develop the ensemble (Cole & Chinoy 1970: 664).

With the Open Theatre Chaikin developed what was referred to as the 'transformation exercise'. During the exercise actors were free to respond to the established situation intuitively by transforming themselves physically into an object or an animal or another character. Through this process and through collaboration between the ensemble and playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie, three one-act plays were generated which eventually were presented under the title *America Hurrah* at the Pocket Theatre in May 1966. Although *America Hurrah* shared important characteristics with a number of previous productions this triplet marked a point at which the work of the Open Theatre achieved both commercial success and critical acceptance. *America Hurrah* ran for over a year and, as already noted, toured to London's Royal Court theatre in the summer of 1967. Four years later the Open



Theatre returned to London and played at the Roundhouse, a visit organised by Nancy Meckler's husband David Aukin.

### *La MaMa*

The founding of La MaMa in New York's East Village by Ellen Stewart (Marwick 1998: 344) in 1961 changed the course of alternative theatre in America and internationally.

Stewart's original aspiration for La MaMa was to provide a venue so that her 'brother', Fred Lights, could have his plays produced. Lights was black so mainstream producers at the time were reluctant to consider his work. Stewart had money from her work as a fashion designer and could afford to hire a basement space on 9<sup>th</sup> Street in the East Village. She called the space La MaMa.

The venue was tiny and unkempt but Ellen Stewart's initiative ensured that it was full of possibilities, a place where people could come and things could happen. Stewart was told that she could not sell refreshments at La MaMa because she did not have a licence. So Stewart would pass the hat around and those who contributed could come any time during the week to see the show again. Most shows lasted a week. Hot chocolate and instant coffee was served in plastic cups. The actors were paid very little, if anything at all. Stewart was still working for Victor Bijou as a fashion designer and the 'Miss Ellen' label, but was not allowed out on the catwalk. Stewart maintained a sewing room next door to the La MaMa space and lived in an apartment upstairs at the premises. Early on neighbours reported her to police as running a brothel when they saw a black woman and white men (playwrights, out-of-work actors) entering the building. Ellen Stewart knew nothing about theatre but thought that, if you did something, it was more fulfilling than sitting around wondering about doing it. There was enough space at La MaMa for a small audience and a bed on stage.

La MaMa existed to provide opportunities for new talent of all types. Initially it remained unsung in Manhattan and unknown elsewhere. When La MaMa had been going for some time Stewart wanted to secure funding. She had been told that she could get a Rockefeller grant if she could accumulate some positive reviews. Stewart could not get the established press to go to the East Village venue so La MaMa first had to tour to Europe to achieve critical recognition (Crespy 2003: 86) if she was to qualify for a Rockefeller grant. The La MaMa tour to Paris in September 1965 turned the enterprise into a celebrated company and the East Village basement into a place of pilgrimage for avant-garde directors from Europe such as Max Stafford-Clark in 1968 and Peter Brook with the RSC in 1971. La MaMa became a site of artistic transmission. Stafford-Clark's visit, for example, influenced his establishment of the Traverse Workshop Company, according to Ian Brown who worked on its first show in 1970, and, although later Stafford-Clark's aesthetic returned to a more Stanislavskian approach with Joint Stock, the Traverse Workshop Company's successor, his Joint Stock creative method always maintained collaborative methods clearly derived from La MaMa practices.

We will return to the La MaMa tours of Europe after a brief outline of Stafford-Clark's relationship with La MaMa and Off Off Broadway. Max Stafford-Clark was born 17 March 1941 and educated in Felsted, Essex where he won a year's Exchange scholarship to the United States and the Riversdale County Day School in 1958. Stafford-Clark went to Greenwich Village where he saw the original production of *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee and *The Balcony* by Jean Genet. Together with the opening of Café Cino in 1958, the first New York performance in September 1959 of Edward Albee's one-act play *The Zoo Story* is considered to mark the beginning of Off Off Broadway. In short, Stafford-Clark's theatre education began in New York.

Upon his return to London Stafford-Clark took his father to a number of West End productions including *The Caretaker* by Pinter, *Brand* by Ibsen at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and *The Long and the Short and the Tall* at the Royal Court. Stafford-Clark returned to New York for six weeks in January 1968 to observe and work with La MaMa (Marwick 1998: 351) and worked the follow spot on the original production of *Hair*.

I stayed with Paul Foster. I operated a follow-spot and I went with Tom O'Horgan down to Philadelphia, where a show was opening. I had access to rehearsals, and I also went while I was there to Nancy Meckler's rehearsals before her arrival in this country. So I was a kind of hanger-on. I was minimally useful. But at that point, having done a bit of work myself, the opportunity to absorb from another director was very important (Stafford-Clark 2007: 6).

Later Stafford-Clark and the Traverse Workshop Company would emulate La MaMa by having long rehearsal periods (Stafford-Clark, interview, 2009). When Stafford-Clark resigned as Director of the Traverse and set up the Traverse Workshop Company he lived on £6 a week. He would put each single note in six different drawers and the change from each day went back in the drawer. On the seventh day he would live on the remainder. He practiced communal living and lived off a stew that boiled away during the entire week. Despite these circumstances, his ideas were formulating and one major influence on him was Tom O'Horgan and the La MaMa Theatre Troupe from America.

When Stafford-Clark, before setting up the Traverse Workshop Company, was the Traverse Associate Director he had invited La MaMa over to Britain (Stafford-Clark, 2009). La MaMa toured to Britain with *Futz* by Rochelle Owens, *Melodrama Play* by Sam Shepard and *Tom Paine* by Paul Foster. Stafford-Clark admired the fact that the actors also played musical instruments and that Tom O'Horgan was a skilled musicologist. He met Ellen Stewart of La MaMa and respected the physical commitment of La MaMa which was an essential part of

their success and dynamism and claims to be influenced by La MaMa the Open Space, Living Theatre and Jim Haynes as well as 'Happenings' in London.

In 1965 La MaMa toured Europe in two minibuses called Helen and The Star Car. One was purchased for them by the playwright John Arden (Porter, 2011). Their work was receiving largely positive reviews and they had a growing reputation. They rarely stayed in hotels as Ellen Stewart would arrange various places for them to stay. The idea of touring La MaMa productions to Europe coincided with a growing interest in certain American playwrights. Paul Foster's *Hurray for the Bridge* was presented at La MaMa in 1964 and he also worked on a Spanish version which was then staged in Bogota, Colombia, and later at the Festival of Cali. That production generated a booking by a theatre festival in Germany. The play then gained the notice of the Danish director Jens Okking who had the script translated for a staging in Denmark. Foster and Stewart travelled together to see the production as well as another Foster play staged in Denmark called *The Recluse*. They were greatly impressed by the enthusiastic and sizeable audiences. Another foreign production involving La MaMa artists took place when two regular La MaMa performers, Mary-Claire Charba and Jacque Lynn Colton received praise for their roles in Tom Eyan's *The White Whore and the Bit* at the famous Shakespeare and Co. bookstore in Paris. European audiences and critics at this time were more appreciative of avant-garde theatre than were Americans generally. This convinced Stewart that the critical response abroad would potentially open doors back home for La MaMa and its artists.

Back back in New York Stewart activated a plan to return to Europe later in 1965 with a group of actors, directors and playwrights. La MaMa left New York in September 1965 with sixteen La MaMa artists, twenty-two plays and some props. Stewart selected pieces which she considered to be the best plays La MaMa had produced since 1962. The company was split in two and Tom O'Horgan and Ross Alexander were chosen as directors. According to

the plan one company was intended to play in Copenhagen for six weeks and the other in Paris during the same time period. According to the plan after six weeks the two troupes were intended to then switch cities (Bottoms 2004:195).

Circumstances intervened. The Living Theatre had recently played to hostile audiences in Paris. Ross Alexander's La MaMa troupe encountered similar problems and returned to New York prematurely. Tom O'Horgan's troupe, however, received a more positive response and met with receptive audiences in Copenhagen, then Paris. The O'Horgan's troupe returned to Denmark from Paris for an extended engagement. The plays included *Chicago* by Sam Shepard, *This is the Rill Speaking* by Lanford Wilson, *The Recluse* by Paul Foster, *Thank You, Miss Victoria* by William Hoffman, *Birdbath* by Leonard Melfi, *The Circus* by Gerald Schoenwolf, and *War and America Hurrah* by Jean-Claude van Itallie.

Although the O'Horgan La MaMa group enjoyed a strong European reception with audiences and critics, in certain ways touring was a difficult experience for the troupe. From the first performance in Paris (at the American Centre for the Arts) there were problems with audience reactions to unconventional material. David Davies, who headed the Centre, was offended by *America Hurrah* which featured masks and life-size puppets designed by Robert Wilson. During the course of the play the figures destroyed a hotel room while scribbling profanity on its walls. Davies gave the troupe twenty-four hours to pack up and leave after the performance. La MaMa left Paris and headed immediately for Denmark. Stewart, now desperate to keep expenses down, convinced the French railroad to let her travel in freight with the *America Hurrah* puppets, thereby avoiding a passenger fare. In Copenhagen, by contrast, the troupe received, as noted above, a warm reception from established Danish theatre critics. The Danish press considered the troupe to be full of energy and passion but short on acting training and professional technique. Even though the performances were evaluated as amateur the plays were given serious consideration and La MaMa was invited

back for two more tours in 1966. These tours took the troupe back to Denmark, Sweden, Yugoslavia and England.

### *Tom O'Horgan and his work with La MaMa*

Ellen Stewart kept La MaMa's basement space when she moved the troupe to a venue over a laundrette. The La MaMa workshops run by Tom O'Horgan were doing things that were not being done anywhere else at the time. O'Horgan was a trained musician and incorporated musical elements into his work. He had a large collection of musical instruments and could play all of them proficiently. His workshop ideas, amongst others, were somewhat inspired by a recent book written about work being done to facilitate the development of autistic children, based on the theory that autistic children often missed out on the crawling stage (Porter, 2011). When movements associated with crawling were produced in autistic children by external manipulation, notable results occurred. O'Horgan became interested in exploring non-verbal theatre. Equally important, O'Horgan had written operas. He wanted to direct his eclectic ideas towards the theatre. He believed that theatre is what happens in the communion between the actors and the audience.

O'Horgan's ideas resonated with Ellen Stewart's aspirations. He had rejected the predictability of conventional theatre and wanted to create something else. Stewart looked for plays that lent themselves to the kind of exploration that Tom O'Horgan was interested in. For example, originally *Hair* was not initially planned or staged as the innovative phenomenon ultimately created by O'Horgan's vision. Together Stewart and O'Horgan felt that theatre could achieve what other forms of performance, such as ballet, could not achieve because theatre can draw many disciplines together.

Paul Foster, who wrote *Tom Paine*, also believed in this vision.. Foster had been with Stewart from the beginning and was enthusiastic about O'Horgan's approach. At the time that the

European tour was about to depart Foster had only written Part 1 of *Tom Paine*. Foster accompanied La MaMa to Europe and worked on the script in Denmark where La MaMa had a major fan base. At the time La MaMa was crossing tours in Europe with the Grotowski troupe and the Living Theatre. Also in their rep was *Futz* by Rochelle Owens which was about a farmer's passion for one of his pigs. Owens was initially resistant to O'Horgan's approach of creating a mini-chorus through workshops on the production but ultimately it was a very effective device. By the time La MaMa returned to Edinburgh from Paris *Tom Paine* was completed. The producers at the Churchill Theatre in Edinburgh arranged a transfer to the Vaudeville Theatre in London. There is a moment in the play when the action stops and audience members are invited to come up on to the stage and contribute their dialogue in the spirit of Tom Paine by not being passive or restricted. The production celebrated the questioning of orthodox ideas at the time (Marowitz 1973: 133-134).

### *Triumph: Hair*

*Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* (1967) by Galt MacDermot, Gerome Ragni and James Rado is referred to throughout this thesis but given the topic of this study it is germane to discuss specifically its impact in Britain. Joseph Papp was an important advocate for free public theatre beginning with the establishment of the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1954. Papp established the Public Theatre in 1967 with the intention of imitating the London branch of the Royal Shakespeare Company in putting on contemporary productions aimed at an audience comprised of a large cross-section of society. The Public Theatre opened on 29 October 1967 with *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*.

After an initial run *Hair* continued to play at a midtown Manhattan discotheque, then was retooled and transferred to the Biltmore on Broadway in 1968 (Wollman 2006: 42). The production was completely restructured by La MaMa director Tom O'Horgan. Papp did not

prioritise pleasing conventional middle-class Broadway audiences with his work but rather he was interested in connecting with the younger generation who were concerned with contemporary issues and changing society. At the time Britain offered an example for Papp of the way in which theatrical innovation advanced across a broad front in the new civic theatres which were essentially a legacy of the war.

On 26 September 1968 the new Theatres Act removed the Lord Chamberlain's licensing provision from the statute books. The next day *Hair*, directed by O'Horgan, opened at the Shaftesbury Theatre in London. Many within the alternative theatre movement regarded the production as a betrayal and a commercial sell-out (Bottoms 2004: 210-213). Nonetheless *Hair* originated in the experimental realm of Off Off Broadway theatre in New York. In preparation for the production Tom O'Horgan adopted an old tactic used at Café Cino of searching the streets of New York, looking for people he believed looked right for the piece and inviting them to audition.

*Hair* posited radical themes, including anti-Vietnam sentiment, free love, L.S.D., communal living and racial and sexual equality. Performances of *Hair* were adjusted and localised to fit the particular communities in which they took place which was also the case with the London production. In many communities the production was besieged by bomb scares and death threats (Johnson 2004:124) but nonetheless at the end of each performance the audience was still encouraged to come up on stage and commune with the cast through song and dance. As Charles Marowitz observed,

Every so often a show comes along which consolidates some part of the zeitgeist and whose significance is less in what it is than the time at which it arrives, and in the face of such a show, drama criticism suddenly appears like a gross impertinence because one can no sooner review the Present than attempt to evaluate the latitude and longitude of



one's native city. *Hair* is such a show. It is the cohesion of a dozen contemporary trends, the most dominant of which is hip-culture, drug-enthusiasms, the Cage concept of Indeterminacy and the Marcussian theory of protest. Coming as the first blast after the Lord Chamberlain's demise, it has properly shook up London-town (Marowitz 1973: 142).

This comment is emblematic of a micro/macro parallel to be made regarding the generation of alternative theatre in Britain examined in this study. In a sense an individual instance of performance such as the London premiere of *Hair* is a microcosm of contemporaneous life. It encompasses both the individual experience as well as providing a prism for contemporaneous events and trends. The individual and collective impetus of theatre practitioners combined, reflected and reinforced changes taking place in British culture and society.

We now look in depth at a one-time assistant to Tom O'Horgan who forged a bridge between Off Off Broadway and British alternative theatre.

### *Beth Porter and London La MaMa*

Beth Porter was born in New York City on 23 May 1942. She attended Bard College in upstate New York, then transferred to Hunter College in the city. Hunter College was a progressive university in the early 1960s and participated in events which marked socio-cultural shifts at the time. In Greenwich Village at the time you could walk down the street and meet the likes of Bob Dylan, before the pressures of fame and celebrity took hold. (Porter, 2011). Andy Warhol used to frequent The Dom, the American equivalent of a Working Men's Club. Warhol used this as his stomping ground and later established 'The Factory' there to make what he was doing more publicly available. Beth Porter went to The Dom for the delicious, cheap food (Porter, 2011). 'Happenings' took place in lofts and little theatres at the time, events not frequented by or recognised by the establishment. Beth Porter

met people like Allen Ginsberg and Robert Frank with whom she made a film called *Me and My Brother*. Apart from writers for the *Village Voice*, no reviewers passed below 14<sup>th</sup> Street. This theatre activity was radical: it subverted the norms, geographical as much as aesthetic, of established New York theatre.

Hunter College, one of the University of N.Y.C. college, enrolled only women at the time. It had a reputation for its theatre, theatre criticism and history of art courses. The woman running the theatre department was named Vera Mowry. Mowry mounted a production of *Othello* featuring Beth Porter as Emilia. Mowry searched Off Off Broadway looking for out-of-work actors to bring in for her productions. One such actor was Neil Flannagan who was with Caffe Cino, and Michael Warren-Powell who at the time was Lanford Wilson's lover. Wilson came to see *Othello* and later took Porter to meet Ellen Stewart at La MaMa's new venue on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (Porter, 2011).

Stewart was producing Wilson's play, *The Rimers of Eldritch*, and Wilson wanted Porter to be in it. Stewart agreed. Porter played opposite Fred Forrest while the La MaMa prototype troupe, under the direction of Tom O'Horgan, was touring in Europe. Porter found Stewart to be unexpectedly beautiful and extremely down-to-earth (Porter, 2011). Stewart believed in her instincts and wanted to make things happen for people she believed in. She completely changed Porter's life (Porter, 2011). Stewart allowed Porter to have experiences she had never expected to have, including forming the Warehouse La MaMa in London. Stewart introduced Porter to Tom O'Horgan She was then cast in *East Bleecker* by Jack Micheline, playing a Mexican whore. Stewart still wanted to gather a reliable and good troupe together in order to secure the Rockefeller grant and wanted new blood and expertise to assist her. Beth Porter was invited to join La MaMa and to do workshops with Tom O'Horgan.

Prior to the company going to Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, Porter became ill and had to stay behind in New York where she was cared for by Harvey Milk and his then partner, Jack Galen McKinley (Porter, 2011). She became O'Horgan's assistant (O'Horgan was also assisted by Cameron Mackintosh). Working with O'Horgan made it possible for Porter to go to England and ultimately set up her own company. She approached Stewart to say that she would like to set up a La MaMa company in Europe. Originally Porter did not want the new troupe to be London-based as she wanted it to be a touring company and nomadic. Porter did not want a director since she thought O'Horgan would be irreplaceable and wanted the troupe to be a creative collective instead (Porter, 2011). Stewart agreed but said they could not take the La MaMa label until they had proved themselves. It was at this time Max Stafford-Clark was attending La MaMa workshops and taking notes on their methods of work.

During the London production of *Hair*, Porter, along with other performers and O'Horgan, all shared a flat while rehearsing at Shaftesbury Theatre. Porter ran some of the rehearsal workshops for the show as did the Beatles' friend and collaborator Victor Spinetti who was a Tony-winning actor, a product of Joan Littlewood's Stratford East Theatre Workshop, and later star of Jane Arden's *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven* at the Drury Lane Arts Lab in 1969. Porter got to know Spinetti and was invited to his parties. There was a sense of community. Porter's group was making their own theatre and looking for a place to discover and perform. Porter rang around to people she met during that year and all of them were encouraging and helpful (Porter, 2011).

#### *Wherehouse La MaMa (1968-1972)*

Jim Haynes had recently opened the Arts Lab on Drury Lane in August of 1967 and let Porter's La MaMa group work in the space for free. Wherehouse La MaMa developed its

work there and did its first presentation at the Drury Lane Arts Lab. Other companies working at the Arts Lab at the time included the Portable Theatre and the People Show. At its inception The Warehouse Company included: Stephen Rea, Dinah Stabb, Maurice Colbourne and Nancy Meckler, who had come over from the United States to join them. Porter and Meckler both have differing accounts of the split with Warehouse La MaMa that lead to the formation of Freehold. I will provide each of their accounts respectively beginning with Porter here and then revisiting Meckler in Chapter Six. Meckler had been a Stage Manager on a number of La MaMa Plexus shows in New York and was an ambitious director. However at the time Porter did not want a director and said that Meckler could only observe and take part in the workshops (Porter, 2011).

The troupe which would formally be named Warehouse La MaMa presented *Street Piece* (1968) which evolved out of workshop exercises requiring actors to walk at geometric angles and choose whether or not to encounter, verbally or not, the person you met at the corner of your turning. The play was evocative of and about urban life. The actors also performed the witches' scene from *Macbeth* in O'Horgan's style, using a strange cacophony of sounds and a varying number of witches. Another piece was *Mr Jello* (1968) by George Bernissa, which had been given to the group by Stewart (Porter, 2011). It was about the disappointments of personal relationships but was also comical, weird and liberating for the actors and audience. Actors worked without a director trying to put into practice what they had learnt from O'Horgan. *Mr. Jello* was presented at the Drury Lane Arts Lab. Stewart was supporting the new troupe's actors financially during this time, combining assets she contributed with the box-office earnings to support the troupe. There was not a lot of money available but the first 10% of anything went towards administration, props and other expenses and the rest was divided equally amongst company (Porter, 2011). Because of the reviews the troupe received Ellen Stewart then allowed Porter's company to take the name of The Warehouse La MaMa

and as such it also became known as London La MaMa. Its patrons were Victor Spinetti, Ellen Stewart and Anthony Shaffer the English playwright, novelist and screenwriter.

After appearing in the stage version of *Futz*, Beth Porter was asked to act in the film version of *Futz* (1969) which was shooting in California in 1968, produced by Ben Shapiro and Alan Stroh. Porter had to fly out for the filming of *Futz* but, according to Porter, before she left some of the actors complained about the way Nancy Meckler had been treating them (Porter, 2011). According to Porter, upon her return from California, she arrived at the usual rehearsal space to find that Meckler had taken over the company and the rehearsals, saying that Porter could not expect to be just slotted back in after having left for her film shoot. Porter said that Meckler could not take over the company and so Meckler left with some of the actors to form what later became known as Freehold.

Wherehouse La MaMa presented a play at the Brighton Combination and Porter was joined by Cindy Oswin, Dave Webster and his wife, Jean Michaelson. Neil Hornick, from *Phantom Captain*, joined them a little later on. Tours in Europe were booked, along with festivals, and publicity was sent out. Wherehouse La Mama had a rehearsal space in Gerrard Street which they also hired out. They presented *Street Pieces* and *Witches* (1968) and were evolving a piece called *Group Juice* (1968) at the same time (Porter, 2011). *Group Juice* was a very physical piece. Wherehouse La MaMa tended not to write things down so there were hardly any scripts. During the performance of *Group Juice* the audience came into the theatre and the actors were standing around talking. Then the actors formed themselves into a line and the audience members were enjoined to stand by whomever they wanted. The actor with the longest line of people became the piece's protagonist (Porter, 2011). The play was intended to be like a journey through life, involving birth, education, army training, action and death. The play was non-intellectual, very physical and startling in that nothing else quite like it was being done at that time in Britain. In rehearsals the actors would take turns being the 'eye',

standing outside the action and shaping the performance. This brought a particular cohesion and feel to the work (Porter, 2011).

Wherehouse La MaMa also produced *The Hilton Keynes Blow Your Chances Top of the Heap Golden Personality Show of the Week* (1969). This piece was developed because Neil Hornick who had an academic background, was interested in psychology and psychosexuality, and had read a book on self-mutilation or body mutilation (Porter, 2011). The impetus for the performance piece was the idea that a confrontation with such difficult themes combined with the potential efficacy of performance creates the possibility to reshape identity.

Wherehouse La MaMa also found themselves disappointed with British television in general as it seemed to be influenced by American commercialism and entertainment. Quiz shows placed a monetary value on knowledge. So they took the idea to a comic extreme knowing they would shock British audiences and produced their own 'quiz show' (Porter, 2011). The quiz show was run by Hilton Keynes (Roy Martin), whose name combines the commercialism of the hotel chain and the bureaucratic planning control embedded in the British new town Milton Keynes, in a glitzy tuxedo and his lovely assistant Jean Michaelson who was in fact nine months pregnant. The actors went into the audience posing as drug police to root out drugs in the audience. Beth Porter was planted in the audience as a volunteer. Having worked and learned from O'Horgan they were all physically agile. The encounter with Porter turned into an acrobatic act. At the end they were applauded by the audience, then used an APPLAUD sign as in a stereotypical recording studio. The performance included a talent act involving the Royal Family dressed in costumes and masks as well as a saxophone-playing corgi. There was also a 'Memory Man' in an enclosed booth answering questions. If he got a question wrong, gas was poured into the booth. The final question was how many Jews were killed in the war? Answers began with '300?' and gas

poured into the booth. The Memory Man tried again, but every time he got the answer wrong more gas poured into the booth until the man was dead. These constructions amounted to the 'acts' of the play. Irving Wardle nominated Porter as the most promising actress of the year in *The Times* (Porter, 2011).

Wherehouse La MaMa presented the show at The Place courtesy of a contact with the leading Martha Graham dancer, Robert Cohan, who was based at The Place and because a company member had designed the original seating for the venue (Porter, 2011). Wherehouse La MaMa went on to play at the Newcastle Festival, Edinburgh and then went on tour in Europe. People who saw the show would ring up the company and invite them to come to their festivals. Porter would negotiate on the phone by asking for costs to cover travel, board, food and company wages which had to be in cash as they had no bank account (Porter, 2011).

Ellen Stewart invited Wherehouse La MaMa to perform in New York. Before that she paid for, in London, the production of William Hoffman's, a La MaMa playwright's play, *XX XXX*, subtitled *A Nativity Play* (1970), which Wherehouse performed at Marowitz's Open Space. The critic Harold Hobson hated it so much that he suggested the Arts Council should discontinue its funding. Wherehouse had a falling out with Thelma Holt at the Open Space. Holt, according to Porter, then refused to pay them. According to Porter there was an uneasy relationship between Charles Marowitz and Wherehouse La MaMa. The Wherehouse Company went to New York in 1971 where Stewart was presenting a rotation of other visiting companies at La MaMa, including Theatre of the Ridiculous and The Ridiculous Theatre Company. Stewart asked The Wherehouse Company to align with the Playhouse of the Ridiculous in a presentation of a play called *The Organ Grinder or The Monkey* (1970), presented alongside the other work which they had been developing independently (Porter, 2011). Wherehouse La MaMa provides an example of a direct link between British alternative theatre and an American Off Off Broadway exemplar.

### *Bread and Puppet*

Bread and Puppet also came to Britain and was another influence on British alternative theatre as well as forms of public protest incorporating elements of theatricality. As Kathleen McCreery of Broadside Mobile Workers Theatre stated,

We learn from today's filmmakers, from groups such as Bread and Puppet, from dancers, musicians, journalists and from other theatre groups. We are continually experimenting with new forms (Itzin 1980: 241).

The early training of Peter Schumann, born in Germany in 1934, was in the sculptural arts. He arrived in New York at the time of Kaprow's Happenings in 1957 and did his first theatrical work at the Living Theatre. In 1963 he founded the Moosaka Puppet Theatre and then came across the material which made it possible to create the fourteen-foot tall puppets which were to become characteristic of what became known as the Bread and Puppet Theatre. Bread and Puppet Theatre was based in a loft in Delancey Street in lower Manhattan. At the end of performances bread was distributed to the audience. Schumann explained that he and his colleagues named the theatre The Bread and Puppet because they felt that theatre should be as basic as bread.

Bread and Puppet was a pacifist theatre company influenced by the principles of nineteenth-century Romanticism and early Christianity. Its work focused on themes involving the natural environment and the corruption of both nature and man through greed and power. The company saw itself as connected to an ancient art form in puppetry and rejected the Western tradition of literary theatre. Bread and Puppet most often performed in non-traditional spaces and was perhaps best known for its production of *The Cry of the People for Meat* (1969) which involved two twenty-foot tall puppets, including Mother Earth and a sinister Uncle Sam representing the forces of greed and imperialism. The Virgin Mary appeared in many



Bread and Puppet productions in the form of a Grey Lady, a sorrowing mother puppet. Other well-known Bread and Puppet pieces included *The Great Warrior* (1963), *A Man Says Goodbye to his Mother* (1966) and *Domestic Resurrection Circus* (1970).

The first Bread and Puppet peace demonstration took place on 3 March 1964 (Marwick 1998: 345-346). Bread and Puppet responded to the beginning of the American bombing of North Vietnam in February 1965 with the Greenwich Village Puppet Parade, March 1965. In April 1965 Bread and Puppet participated in a March on Washington to end American involvement in Vietnam. Bread and Puppet participated in several anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in America but also in Britain. In a march in New York in November 1966 Bread and Puppet marched with Allen Ginsberg. A sound-truck played music by the Supremes and the Beatles.

Artistic recognition in America for the Bread and Puppet Theatre came with the production of *Fire* in 1966. *Fire* was the first of three plays dealing directly with Vietnam. In one sense artistic recognition was a form of success. But even when the company was invited to perform at the World Theatre Festival at Nancy in April 1968 Schumann maintained an unbending rejection of worldly success. To be interested in success or even modest success was frowned upon within the company. In Britain Bread and Puppet collaborated with Ed Berman and Inter-Action and also appeared at the Royal Court in 1969. In fact, they have been widely celebrated and are singled out as icons of the 1960s and the anti-Vietnam protest movement.

### *Conclusion*

Collectively the American based groups discussed in this chapter were responsible for a surge of creativity and the injection of new practices, ideas and ways of generating theatre in Britain. The influence of the four major American groups which toured Britain during the 1960s and 1970s on the landscape of British alternative theatre was critical. This influence

would serve to broaden the horizons of theatre practice in Britain and its engagement with British society. During this period there were several anti-Vietnam war protest marches in Britain, many of which involved a certain level of theatricality and included such groups as Bread and Puppet. Peter Brook's production of *US* at the Aldwych Theatre in 1966 challenged the American involvement in Vietnam. During the rehearsal process for *US* Brook and the RSC consulted with both Susan Sontag and Joseph Chaikin (Chambers 2004: 155). In an interview given at the time Brook stated the following:

*The Royal Shakespeare Theatre* is using public money to do a play about Americans at war in Vietnam. This fact is so explosive, and has brought out so many contradictory reactions, that for once some explanation seems necessary. There are times when I am nauseated by the theatre, when its artificiality appals me, although at the very same moment I recognise that its formality is its strength. The birth of *US* was allied to the reaction of a group of us who quite suddenly felt that Vietnam was more powerful, more acute, more insistent a situation than any drama that already existed between covers. (Peter Brook 1987: 61)

The impact of the Off Off Broadway movement on the founding of the Other Place and Warehouse spaces at the Royal Shakespeare Company as well as the theatre upstairs at the Royal Court was important. In *Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC* (1980) Colin Chambers details how the establishment of the Other Place and the Warehouse venues at the RSC were influenced by American Off Off Broadway such as the work of La MaMa and Ellen Stewart. In doing this Chambers establishes a link between the experimental practices of the Off Off Broadway movement and a publicly subsidised institution within the British theatre. Buzz Goodbody, who was responsible for the Warehouse and Other Place venues at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon, also worked at Charles Marowitz's Open Space Theatre. Marowitz's assistant at the Open Space, the American Walter Donahue was the Literary Manager of the Other Place. As we have noted, the RSC also visited La MaMa in New York

in 1971 when the company was officially in New York to perform Peter Brook's famous production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (Chambers, 2011).

In concluding this chapter, it may help to provide one clear final example of the sort of American influence on alternative theatre practice in Britain during this period. The Pip Simmons Group was founded at the Drury Lane Arts Lab in 1968 and combined social commentary with a physical theatre mode of performance, although interestingly Simmons himself did not go to the United States until 1973. The Group's main body of work was based on representations of American culture and society. Its production of *Superman* (1969), for example, was inspired by American culture, based on a real life comic book in which Superman becomes involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In the play Superman is the star of a TV talk show. He delivers theories about the reasons for different social problems but in a cartoon style with the sort of dialogue one would find in a comic-book bubble.

Equally important, the Pip Simmons Group's production of *Do It!* (1971) was about the student protests and the violent police reaction to them at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, described in a subsequent Walker Report as a 'police riot' (Walker 1968: 1, 10-11).

The first half was an attempt to recreate the 1968 riots in the auditorium...At one point during *Do It!* The Yippies threw faeces into the faces of the Pentagon guards and then proceeded to run hysterically through the audience demanding support for their actions. Simmons once described to me the reaction during a performance at Southampton University...At Southampton it took about five minutes for the audience to get the message. Then one actor screamed "Come on! You can't all be pigs!" and about thirty people joined the actors running through the audience. It was like a madhouse (Ansorge 1975: 30).

There was an ideological transaction as the performance challenged the fundamental constitution of the audience's community identity. The perceived ideological meaning of the performance was directly influenced by the particular context in which the performance took place. At the heart of much of the company's work was an attack on mainstream liberal values.

The Group's next production was *The George Jackson Black and White Minstrel Show* (1973), based on minstrel shows which historically were wildly popular in the American South. Towards the end of the first half a mock slave auction was held, into which the company incorporated the audience.

The audience were deliberately lured into the snares of racial thinking. Towards the end of the first half a slave auction was held. The minstrels ran through the audience begging to be bought. The purpose was to evoke a direct response from the audience... I watched several people in the audience ask their slaves to buy them drinks; a few gave them their freedom. They had accepted the false vocabulary of a master-slave relationship (Ansorge 1975: 34).

The direct link between developing alternative practice in British theatre and its American models could perhaps not be more clearly demonstrated.

We turn now to four American practitioners of alternative theatre during the period 1956-1980 whose seminal work occasioned, tested and encoded alternative American theatre practices in British contexts. Our goal is to analyse the contributions of each individually as well as collectively to alterations in culture, identity and performance efficacies, and to assess the contribution each made to the history of influence traced above.

### Chapter Five: Jim Haynes

This chapter explores the contribution Jim Haynes made to British theatre and British culture more generally starting in 1956 when he was first stationed at a US military installation outside of Edinburgh, Scotland. According to Haynes, he does not believe in the concept of art, strictly speaking. In his view art is just information which some people write, others perform and others play. For him art is all based on imagination and experience. A child's drawing to him is as important as a Rembrandt (Haynes, 2011, David Weinberg Interview Collection). Haynes, from Louisiana, was a key founder of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in 1963 and the Arts Lab on Drury Lane in 1967. These experimental venues were immensely important seedbeds and catalysts for theatrical change and innovation on both technical and aesthetic levels. It is useful to consider Haynes's history before considering the venues and publications he started.

Haynes was born in Haynesville, Louisiana, on 10 November 1933. As mentioned in the Introduction, Haynes was born coincidentally in the same parish as Ellen Stewart, the founder of La MaMa. His memories of his early years in a Southern town are that he was always out of step with the racism he claims to have fought whenever it appeared, even from an early age. Haynes read his father's books, including Langston Hughes's *I Too Sing America* and Dorothy Parker's poetry which had an early effect on him (Haynes, 2009, Unfinished Histories). His father was in the oil business in Venezuela and when Haynes was thirteen years old, the family moved there. Haynes lived in Venezuela for two years (1946-1948) and attended an international school there which had small class sizes. At the end of two years his parents elected to send him to the Georgia Military Academy in Atlanta where he stayed for three years before enrolling at Louisiana State University. At the military boarding school he was at the top of his class and ran a literary society (Haynes, 2009, UH). He travelled between the United States and Venezuela repeatedly. This made him early on, he claims, a

world traveller and contributed to his dreams, aspirations and hopes. Haynes first saw theatre locally in Shreveport, Louisiana, and Off Broadway productions when he went to New York. He remembers seeing *Porgy and Bess*, *South Pacific* and *The Threepenny Opera* with Lotte Lenya (Haynes, 2009, UH) on Broadway.

Haynes joined the Air Force in 1955 as a Russian language specialist. He was stationed at Kirknewton Air Force Base outside of Edinburgh where he saw his first Edinburgh Festival Fringe production in 1956: Ugo Betti's *Corruption in the House of Justice* by the Oxford University Dramatic Society at the Moray House Theatre in the Royal Mile. Haynes's job was to monitor Soviet radio transmissions. Therefore his very presence in the UK was a direct consequence of military links between the US and Britain, the 'special relationship' described by Churchill and solidified because of the Cold War. At that time the Fringe was very small, involving around thirty companies. He met Richard Demarco and his wife and sister there and they became life-long friends. That evening they also attended a late night production of Italian mime at a venue in Tollcross and Haynes went back with the Demarcos to their place and talked until breakfast (Demarco, 2011).

After Haynes was discharged from the US Air Force he opened the Paperback Bookshop in Charles Street, in the middle of Edinburgh University's city campus, in 1959, whose presence was famously marked by the head of a rhinoceros which hung outside it. The bookshop appears to have been the first to specialise in paperback books in Britain. After he finished in the military his parents wanted him to return home and train as a lawyer, however he wanted to stay in Edinburgh and therefore he was financially on his own. He sold his car to buy the freehold of a junk shop for £300 so that he could open the bookshop. He had no problems staying in Edinburgh after leaving the US Air Force because Britain allowed people to stay if they generated money and employed people. He had permanent residency in Britain from 1959 onward. Haynes wrote to bookshops and publishers all over Britain, saying that he was

starting a bookshop next to the University which would sell only paperback books. According to Haynes contacts in Scandinavia provided him with books that were out of print in Britain. The area's original buildings are now demolished and replaced by the modern buildings of the University's Department of Informatics, outside which a statue of a rhinoceros head and a plaque commemorates the former presence of the Paperback Bookshop on that site. The Bookshop comprised two small rooms on the main floor, together with a basement and a basement gallery.

Local sculptors and tapestry makers used the gallery, the first of its type in Edinburgh. Haynes gave out free tea and coffee to those visiting the bookshop and stocked books that were banned elsewhere. He became friends with an English language publisher in Paris, Maurice Girodias, who, in 1953, had started Olympia Press which specialised in erotic writing. Girodias provided books to Haynes such as Frank Harris's *My Life and Loves*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Lawrence Durrell's *The Black Book*, *The Ginger Man* by J.P. Donleavy and many other titles not available elsewhere.

In 1960, after the famous trial under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 which allowed Penguin to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Haynes started selling the book in his Paperback Bookshop. One day a retired missionary, Agnes Cooper, purchased a copy of the book and removed it from the bookshop using a pair of coal tongs. She proceeded to set the book on fire while yelling at gathering bystanders. Haynes called Richard Demarco who captured the incident in a photograph. The event was then widely reported in the media throughout the UK and internationally. Haynes received letters of support from many people, including the founder of Penguin, Allen Lane.

The bookshop was used for signings, concerts and performances. The first of these occasions took place in 1960, and Haynes dates the journey of the Traverse Theatre from this point

onward. The first production was a stage adaptation of David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, (Haynes 1984: 41). The production involved two actors dressed as eighteenth-century scholars, drinking claret, smoking pipes and discussing philosophy. In *The Sunday Times* Harold Hobson described the Edinburgh Festival production as the best thing in town, at the best venue, during August 1960. The bookshop held sixty people, sitting on benches. Tea and coffee were served after the performance and audiences were invited to stay and discuss the play.

### *Traverse Theatre*

According to Haynes the founding of the Traverse theatre was the story of two love affairs (Haynes, 2009, UH). A man called Tom Mitchell came to know an MA student at Edinburgh University named Tamara Alferoff whom Haynes already knew from taking classes at Edinburgh University. Tamara Alferoff introduced Haynes to Mitchell. Mitchell began buying properties in Edinburgh and one of these was a building in James Court, off the Lawnmarket, the section of the Royal Mile nearest the Castle, a building which became the Traverse. Originally Mitchell was going to turn it into flats but instead Haynes persuaded him to let him rent it for one shilling a week to use as a theatre. The second love affair was that of Haynes and Jane Alexander. During the summer of 1960 Haynes met a woman named Jane Quigley who later became a famous actress known as 'Jane Alexander'. (During the Clinton administration, Jane Alexander became the American equivalent of Britain's Minister for the Arts.) In 1960 Quigley was at the Festival playing in Tennessee William's *Orpheus Descending*. Haynes became an offstage voice in the production. After Quigley returned to the United States, Haynes set about planning a theatre for her to play when she came back to Edinburgh. Ironically Jane Alexander never did play at the Traverse. Alferoff and Alexander inspired the establishment of the Traverse but neither is now remembered for this. Haynes believes that photos of both should hang in the Traverse bar.



Haynes set up the Traverse with the help and active participation of Demarco, John Calder (the publisher who championed avant-garde literature and writers such as Samuel Beckett), and John Martin, a local graphic designer who put money in and did early graphic designs for the theatre. There were also many others who helped 'white wash the fences' to make it happen. *In Praise of Joy: White-Washing Fences* (Mosaic Press) is the title of Haynes's 2005 book, a title which describes his way of getting things done. Haynes took the title from the famous fence-painting episode in *Tom Sawyer* about finding a way to persuade people to join in and help in getting things up and running for free. Haynes did exactly that with the coffee shop and the theatre.

The Traverse Theatre Club was formed in the autumn of 1962 with a constitution and the objective that the club should present serious theatre productions of the type not usually presented for economic reasons, and, in general, for the encouragement of Scottish and other music, poetry, pottery, sculpture, painting, books and art. Haynes established the Traverse under Scots Law and every member of the club was a part-owner. There was a board and an annual general meeting where, every year from 1960 to 1966 Haynes would be made Chair until he chose to step down.

The Traverse Theatre Club opened on 2 January 1963 with a double bill of Arrabal's *Orison* and a production of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos* but during the second performance of the Sartre play the actress Colette O'Neill was accidentally stabbed with a paper knife and seriously wounded. Fortunately she recovered but there was publicity as a consequence of the incident. Shortly before the opening of the Traverse Haynes's son Jesper was born to his then wife Viveka. With the exception of a short excursion to the United States with his new born son Jesper and his then wife Viveka, Haynes was involved in all aspects of the theatre's work, all of the time. From Haynes's perspective the bar, gallery and restaurant were just as important as the theatre in creating a space for social interaction. 'Talk Outs' were held in the

theatre, for example, where controversial local topics were debated. Major exhibitions were held in the gallery managed by Demarco, who was also vice-chairman of the management committee. Profits to be used in the theatre came from the bar, restaurant, gallery and membership. The Traverse created a particular school of Scottish playwrights thereby creating a space for the contestation of Scottish national identity. One of the first to come through was the Glaswegian C.P. Taylor, whose 1980 masterwork *Good*, premiered by the RSC and then produced in the West End and on Broadway. Because the Traverse was a club there were no problems with the Lord Chamberlain or censorship and the Traverse could also serve food and drink on Sundays. At one point the Traverse had a grant from the Festival Society which allowed it to pay artists a little more, but generally it paid Equity minimum, £15 per week. According to the website 'Measuring Worth' the modern value of 15 pounds is £257. New work received critical acclaim, the actors got notices and the potential for both made playwrights and actors want to work there.

### *Connections*

Haynes knew the publisher John Calder in London through his ownership of the Paperback Bookshop. Calder knew Charles Marowitz and the director Michael Geliot and introduced both to Haynes. Haynes then involved Geliot, the established Scottish actor and director Callum Mill (Callum Mill was the Artistic Director of the Citizens' Theatre 1960 - 1962 where he staged an international repertoire) and Marowitz with the Traverse. Mill encouraged Haynes who was learning on the job and also brought in a Scottish angle. Marowitz had presented his Theatre of Cruelty season with Peter Brook at L.A.M.D.A. which Haynes had seen. They got on well although Marowitz was not always the most diplomatic of directors. They brought in guest directors, actors and new plays.

A lot went on at the Traverse during Festival time. During the early 1960s few places were open for people to drink and eat late at night and on Sundays, so the Traverse was a place people went to. The Paperback Bookshop used to sell tickets for performances, and productions continued there even after Haynes sold it on. Haynes produced the first Fringe programme in 1960 and got companies presenting work at the theatre to commit to advertising in the pages of the programme, a model that continues to this day.

It is also worth noting that Richard Demarco was in communication with Ellen Stewart of La MaMa during the formative period in the history of the Traverse and Stewart helped and encouraged the efforts of Haynes and Demarco in Edinburgh (Demarco, May 2011). Under Haynes's directorship the intention was to perform exclusively new plays and preferably those with an unconventional structure, although this was not immediately the reality in practice. The programme for the first six months included the plays already mentioned as well as *Two for the See-Saw* by William Gibson, *Fairy Tales of New York* by J.P. Donleavy, Arrabal's *Picnic in the Battle-Field* and *Fando and Lis*, Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell*, Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Ionesco's *The Lesson*, Genet's *The Maids*, Coward's *Private Lives* and *Requiem for a Nun* by William Faulkner (McMillan 1988: 105-106). Plays by Saul Bellow, Samuel Beckett, Heathcote Williams and many others later premiered at the Traverse. (Haynes 1984: 51-57) Ultimately the Traverse collaborated with the La MaMa Troupe in New York and was responsible for the transfer of ground-breaking experimental American productions, mentioned in previous chapters, such as *Futz* by Rochelle Owens and *Tom Paine* by Paul Foster to Britain in 1967. By common consent the Traverse was a bohemian enclave in what was then a run-down working-class area surrounded by a very middle-class and generally hostile city. There can be no doubt that the Traverse challenged and, in time, changed prevailing social and cultural values, at first in Edinburgh and Scotland,

but very soon through its influence, led in its first years by Haynes, throughout the rest of Britain.

In 1962 John Calder, Sonia Orwell and Jim Haynes, set up *The Novel Today* conference. Conference participants were on stage together for a whole week at Edinburgh University's dedicated graduation hall, McEwan Hall. Parties took place every night and the Conference was also part of the official Festival. In 1963, again in McEwan Hall the conveners held a conference on theatre. 120 international theatre artists attended, including Peter Brook, Sir Laurence Olivier, Ionesco and Martin Esslin (Marowitz 1990: 55). In other words, the Traverse was associated with challenging ideas in what was then a rather conservative city. During a scheduled speech at the 1963 conference Marowitz set out to codify a rigid interpretation of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. He insisted that his should be the official interpretation of *Godot*, no flexibility or alternatives allowed. Marowitz's provocation set a chain of events in motion which resulted, on the last day of the conference, in what is widely considered to be the very first 'Happening' in the UK. A "Happening" is a collective experience, based on chance, surrealism, Dada, non-narrative theatre and the Zen Huang Po doctrine of universal mind which held that 'centricity within each event is not dependant on other events' (Aronson 2000:38). For this, Marowitz, Allan Kaprow and a number of collaborators were responsible. Kaprow had earlier coined the term 'Happening' during the spring of 1957 in New York and had since become a well-known practitioner. The 'Happening' was a deliberate attempt to generate performance crisis and subvert and replace dominant post-Renaissance theatre and Western theatrical conventions dating back to Aristotle. In this case, it included a nude woman being wheeled across a gallery space. Although at the time women could appear nude on the British stage as long as they did not move, pictures on the front pages of the national press depicted nudity in motion and it caused a scandal. The 'Happening' itself was received with great outrage by many of the

attenders. Nevertheless it provoked important questions about performance consciousness and what was 'real' and what was 'not real'. Essential questions were posited concerning time and the collective versus individual experience of performance (Marowitz 1990:66).

The 'Happening' was a deliberate attack on the conference participants' fundamental sense of what is theatrical and of identity. In most traditional theatre the play is understood through a cumulative reading of information transferred to the audience through plot, dialogue, sets and costumes. Conventional centres of interest and meaning were totally removed from the 'Happening'. The event was attended by the Queen's cousin, Lord Harewood, then Artistic Director of the Edinburgh Festival, and, importantly, was also televised on the BBC's *Monitor* programme. An unsuccessful case was later brought against the conference organisers in the Scottish Law Courts. The case was front page news for weeks in the UK and influenced the production of many similar events during the 1960s and 1970s (Haynes 1984: 61). A poetry conference proposed for the following year, however, was cancelled as a consequence of the furore. Meantime, the Traverse and Haynes himself had further identified themselves as *enfants terribles* in Scottish, and indeed wider British, cultural circles.

The 'Happening' in Edinburgh is a clear example of performance as ideological transaction. It generated a performance crisis by rupturing the accepted rules and norms which govern the use of signs and conventions in performance. A 'Happening' is seen from as many viewpoints as there are participants and witnesses. There is no common consent about its centres of interest or meaning. Its meaning is dynamically conditioned by contextuality and the spontaneous perceptions of those involved, who tend to respond to stimuli and incidents not specifically intended by the participants, stimuli and incidents often brought into meaning by reactions to prepared events thereby contributing to the potential for performance efficacy.

The majority led by a harried Ken Tynan, apoplectic with rage, deplored the disturbance.... Celebrated directors from Yugoslavia, India, Ireland and Germany called it 'nonsense' and 'child's play'. Joan Littlewood immediately sprang to its defence, dismissing questions such as 'What did it mean?', 'Was it Theatre?', 'Did it succeed?' Alexander Trocchi spat the word 'Dada' in Tynan's face and exclaimed that critics could not merely explain away new forces in art by bundling them into ready-made classifications. (Marowitz 1990: 62-63)

The press and some members of Edinburgh City Council expressed outrage. There were also many complaints about after hours drinking in the Traverse bar. At one point the Traverse came very close to losing its liquor licence in the spring of 1964. Thereafter it established a pattern of being open on Sundays and closed on Mondays. In the summer of 1965 the MP for Edinburgh West, Tory Anthony Stodart, expressed in the House of Commons his grave misgivings about the way in which public money was being spent at Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre Club to stage plays which would have been barred from performance in the ordinary theatres of the country on the grounds of obscenity or for other reasons.

In 1964 the Traverse produced a very successful production of *Happy End* by Weill and Brecht at Edinburgh University. At this time Calder was married to Bettina Jonic, the dancer, singer and director, whose Croatian parents had brought her up in California. Jonic was a well-known interpreter of Brecht's work and had collaborated with Peter Brook and for a time later set up the Actors Work Group in London. Although not central to the argument of this thesis, she illustrates another example of the ways in which Americans and Europeans influenced alternative theatre in Britain and were themselves part of a mutual interaction between British and American theatre and culture generally at this time. The Calders and Haynes were listening to a recording of *Happy End* and decided to mount it at the Traverse, and *Happy End* was one of the hits of the 1964 Festival with Jonic performing. The production later went on to the Royal Court in London. Another Traverse production was

Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* which was performed at the Unitarian Church in Edinburgh where Haynes had been married. It was directed by Michael Ockrent who was a young student at the time and later served as Director of the Traverse from May 1973 until November 1975 (Moffat 1978: 65).

Haynes edited *Traverse Plays* for Penguin (1966). He was already friends with Sir Allen Lane who, as already noted, was an early supporter of the Paperback Bookshop following the controversy surrounding the selling of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. A Heathcote Williams piece in the collection is entitled *The Local Stigmatic* (*Traverse Plays*, 1966). Harold Pinter had introduced Haynes to Williams's work. They became friends and later started the notorious magazine *SUCK* together in Amsterdam. Also in *Traverse Plays* were two Saul Bellow plays for which Marowitz got permission to produce at the Traverse. They were later done at the Fortune Theatre, London, then Off Broadway, then Broadway. Also included in *Traverse Plays* were Marguerite Duras's *La Musica* and *The Old Tune* by Robert Pinget adapted by Samuel Beckett. As this collection shows, the Traverse had the basic aim of putting on plays which the commercial theatre would not touch with the result that early on the theatre was constantly on the verge of financial crisis. The building itself was crumbling and was declared unsafe and had to be vacated in 1969. The theatre was able to survive the decade through subsidies from the Scottish Arts Council. Arts Council funding did not really pick up until after Haynes left although they did fund new writing with £100 and £200 grants. In 1966 the Arts Council subsidy was running at a rate of £7000 a year. Although the Traverse did not work with designers in the early days because of a perceived lack of funds, according to the website 'Measuring Worth', £7000 would amount to around a quarter of a million pounds in today's values. This can be seen as evidence of how innovative and valuable the work of the Traverse was seen to be by this time by the arts funding establishment. Even the Edinburgh City Council, then called the Edinburgh Corporation, contributed small sums of

money. The Traverse did not make money in the way that some other contemporary arts groups did. A committee statement of January 1964 declared it not to be in the interests of members for the Traverse to become a cheap try-out theatre for commercial London managements. Nevertheless it created an obvious line of profit whereby successful productions were sold on to other theatres often in London. Prestige and income were derived from transfers elsewhere.

Although it continues as an important and dynamic creative organisation, at first the Traverse established itself as a major 1960s institution which provided opportunities for new talent particularly among playwrights but also among actors, several of whom, including Tom Conti, subsequently became famous. Other key figures who were nurtured by the early Traverse include Lindsay Kemp and Jack Henry Moore, both of whom in turn made an early impact on the Traverse. Moore began life in Oklahoma. He gained a scholarship to the University of Oklahoma as an engineering student but then switched to a drama course and ended up working in New York, Off Broadway. On a trip to Boston with a friend he picked up a job in Dublin running a detective agency. During his time in Dublin he read an article about Haynes's production of *Happy End* and travelled to Edinburgh to meet Haynes. Haynes could not officially offer him a paid job because Moore did not have a work visa but Haynes offered him somewhere to stay and began to refer work to Moore unofficially (Haynes, 2009, UH).

Both Richard Demarco (2011) and Joyce McMillan (1988) claim that Moore was one of the main reasons why Haynes ultimately left the Traverse. Moore was a very out gay man in Edinburgh when it was still not legal to be so and was also being paid under the table by Haynes to read and select scripts on behalf of himself and the Traverse. It was Moore who read and realised the importance of C.P. Taylor. Moore also spoke French and German and



translated Brecht, Ionesco and French playwrights. However, his unofficial role as Haynes's assistant created tension with members of the committee.

It was when Haynes was staying with Moore in Dublin that he discovered Kemp was doing a show at the Dublin Theatre Festival. Kemp had used up his grant and was stranded and Haynes and Moore helped raise money for Kemp to leave Dublin. Kemp went with them to Edinburgh and presented some of his early work there. He produced an adaptation of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales* and used Thomas's own recording of it in the production. Kemp performed in Genet plays during Festival time at a small space near the Traverse and claimed to be one of a long line of Great British mime artists, even claiming descent from Shakespeare's clown, Will Kemp. He later also worked at the Drury Lane Arts Lab and was a mentor to David Bowie.

Haynes was a consistently controversial figure and often completely at odds with other members of the committee. He had wanted to take Traverse productions to London for some time to extend their runs and investments. While he was still at the Traverse he produced a London season in 1965 at the Arts Theatre and lost money on it. He produced the season under the name of the London Traverse Theatre Company which did Tutte Lemkow's *Lecture to an Academy* (from Kafka). Marowitz directed Taylor's *Happy Days Are Here Again*, and *Green Julia* by Paul Ableman for LTTC. It was a critically successful season and Haynes began looking for a theatre to which he could use to send productions forward and back to Edinburgh.

Also in 1965 Haynes met Jennie Lee, then Minister for Arts, at a conference organised by the Arts Council in Colchester, called 'Problems of Small Theatre' at which he spoke. Lee encouraged him to try the Jeanetta Cochrane for the London Traverse and he did. He asked Ralph Koltai, Marowitz and Michael Geliot to come and direct for him there. No state money

was available, but Jennie Lee knew a West End producer named Frank Coven who put in £2,000 with a West End option on productions.

At the Annual General Meeting back in Edinburgh on 27 April 1966 Haynes declared that if members did not like his choice of plays, then he suggested they start their own theatre and he would join it. By the summer of 1966 Haynes's connection with the Traverse was effectively severed with Haynes himself living in London. He asked Nicholas Fairbairn, a prominent lawyer and supporter of the arts, and later an MP, to take over as Chair but, before his final break with Edinburgh, he enlisted the help of the influential figure, Arnold Goodman, and of Charles Marowitz in establishing the Traverse season at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre in London. After serving as both Artistic Director and Chairman of the Board for the Traverse, Jim Haynes resigned and settled in London on a full-time basis (Haynes 1984: 65). He was awarded the Whitbread prize for outstanding service to British theatre in May 1966.

In 1966 Marowitz and Haynes collaborated on the London Traverse season at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre. The Jeanetta Cochrane was leased to the Traverse for one year. Haynes did not like working there but two hits, already referred to, emerged from the season. Joe Orton's *Loot*, directed by Marowitz, transferred to the Piccadilly Theatre and won the Evening Standard Award for Best Production of 1966. The Bellow plays went to the Fortune Theatre and then New York.

In the years after Haynes's departure Max Stafford-Clark became the emblematic figure of the Traverse. Stafford-Clark was himself a theatre director who, as noted in a previous chapter, took a leave of absence from the Traverse in January 1968 to work with La MaMa in New York (McMillan 1988: 45). Previously, in February 1967 he had directed a triple-bill of plays by the La MaMa playwright Paul Foster at the Traverse under the umbrella title *Dead*

*and Buried*. Then during May through August 1967 La MaMa toured performing Rochelle Owens's *Futz*, Paul Foster's *Tom Paine* and Sam Shepard's *Melodrama Play* in ten European cities, including the Edinburgh Festival. According to Stafford-Clark this period inspired the kind of theatrical experimentation seen in his subsequent work, represented in particular by the La MaMa (Stafford-Clark, 2009). Stafford-Clark followed O'Horgan's model in privileging workshop discovery over fixed text. It is important to note that his subsequent theatre practice also incorporated Stanislavski based research methodology.

The difference was that Tom O'Horgan would not have thought of himself as a great text man. What he did was take a scenario and embellish it, transform it with the work he did with the music and so on. It always went beyond the word. The text was less important. The workshop to *engender* the text was something that came out of Joint Stock. That wasn't anything that La MaMa did. (Stafford-Clark 2007: 6)

Max Stafford-Clark left Trinity College, Dublin in 1966 and went straight to work at the Traverse Theatre. Early on he gained stage management experience at the Traverse and lived in West Bow and then Danube Street in a communal living situation. Originally he had been on a rugby tour with his university, Trinity College, Dublin, in Edinburgh and, rather than drinking with friends after matches (in which he was a good enough scrum-half to have been an international triallist for Ireland) had gone to the Traverse. There he met Richard Demarco and helped him to stuff envelopes on behalf of the theatre. Stafford-Clark, who had directed a review at Trinity, asked Jim Haynes if he could transfer it to the Traverse. They did it as a late night review called *Dublin Fair* and Stafford-Clark was invited back to do it at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. They also received positive reviews and then transferred to London as part of the Traverse season at the Jeanette Cochrane Theatre (Stafford-Clark, 2009).

After returning from observing La MaMa in New York Stafford-Clark produced a paper at the Traverse in April 1968 which claimed that the most important single aspect of the Traverse was the encouragement and development of new playwrights. He argued that it was time for the Traverse to experiment in other directions as well. Stafford-Clark commented that the only director in Britain touching on these areas was Peter Brook of the Royal Shakespeare Company, as exemplified by *Marat/Sade* and *US*. Stafford-Clark worked with writers at the Traverse, including Megan Terry, Rochelle Owens, Howard Brenton, Stanley Eveling and David Edgar, and dreamt at the time of having a permanent company and ensemble. But his aspirations were not to be fulfilled at the Traverse itself.

In November 1969 Stafford-Clark resigned as Director of the Traverse and formed the Traverse Workshop Company which maintained a link with the main Traverse organisation. Michael Rudman, an American Theatre Director, succeeded him as Director of the Traverse Theatre (1970 – 1973) and later became Artistic Director of the Hampstead Theatre (1973 – 1978) and Director of the Lyttelton Theatre at the National (1979 - 1982). The Traverse Workshop Company used the old Traverse space in James Court after the main Traverse organisation moved. Stafford-Clark's Company lived and rehearsed there in the way of a hippie commune. The seeds of Stafford-Clark works were sown during the 1960s (Stafford-Clark, 2009) and subsequently developed further with Joint Stock, the Royal Court and Out of Joint.

### *International Times*

Haynes started the newspaper *International Times* on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1966 at The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, London. Haynes started the *International Times* with Moore, John Hopkins, Jeff Nuttall and Barry Miles. Lord Goodman, previously a supporter, cooled towards him as he thought the paper supported drug taking, which it did not, though it tried to

take the hysteria out of the debate. Haynes started the paper because he realised how much money the Cochrane was wasting on advertising and thought, if the group had its own paper, it would save on promotion costs, which he claims it did. The *IT* was an immediate success, with good sales and avid readership. It became the mouthpiece for the London Underground scene. Haynes himself was one of the first street sellers pitching copies, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, outside of the Aldwych Theatre when Peter Brook's *US* played there. *IT* was important in spreading the word about alternative productions going on at the time. The cost for a copy was one shilling. Haynes borrowed £125 (£1,910 today according to the website Measuring Worth) to pay the printers to do the first issue. For a time the paper was run from the basement of Miles's bookshop Indica on Southampton Row. Lots of writing was also done at Haynes's house.

Haynes tried to present underground films and happenings at the Cochrane but the management was not keen on it. There were lunchtime theatre productions and talks, including an event with Saul Bellow, but Haynes claims he was very frustrated. The productions were costly and therefore had to be successful at the Box Office. Haynes was ready to throw in the towel and set about trying to find a space in Covent Garden. In 1967 he found a couple of empty warehouses at the top of Drury Lane (no. 184) and persuaded the owner to let him have them as an arts space until he required them for commercial use. A three-month notice was to be given. Haynes lived in Drury Lane at the back of the Arts Lab and in Long Acre over a fruit and vegetable shop. His place in Long Acre had a pay phone and people used to drop by for a cup of tea and to use the phone. Haynes had been given a pre-release copy of *Sergeant Pepper* by the Beatles and people also dropped by to listen to that. The apartment had four rooms. Haynes and Jack Henry Moore lived there with many others coming and going.

Haynes met the Beatles through Brian Epstein who asked to meet him. Haynes was friendly with John Lennon and Miles got close to Paul McCartney. The Beatles gave some money to fund the *IT*. Haynes claims he knew Yoko Ono before she met John Lennon. When Yoko Ono came over from New York she organised one of her first happenings at the Cochrane. The launch party for the *IT* was held at the Roundhouse. Arnold Wesker let Haynes have the keys while he was trying to get Centre 42 up and running. 5,000 people attended and Pink Floyd and Soft Machine performed. Paul McCartney and Monica Vitti also attended. The *IT* became an underground newspaper and an alternative to mainstream media.

A new radicalism was in the air: the launching of Britain's first underground newspaper (*International Times*) marks the point at which the counter-culture acquired a recognisable voice. (Hewison 1986: 94)

The *International Times* quickly became concerned with the preoccupations of the protest movement as well as with sex and drugs rather than political revolution strictly speaking.

### *Time Out*

While still an undergraduate, Tony Elliot started assisting Jim Haynes at the *International Times*. In 1968 Elliot founded his own publication *Time Out* as an alternative to *What's On in London* with, according to Jim Haynes, Haynes's help and encouragement. According to his own report, Haynes provided guidance and helped to produce the first copies of *Time Out* which Haynes then handed out together with the *International Times* in front of the Aldwych Theatre while Peter Brook's production of *US* was performing (Haynes, 2011, DWIC).

In 1968 the magazine added the 'Fringe' category to the theatre section, borrowing the term from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Haynes 1984: 151-152). The categories established by *Time Out* in its theatre listings were writer's theatre, experimental theatre, performance art, political theatre and community theatre. This new categorisation in *Time Out* became

important in shaping the scope of the alternative theatre scene and even how groups later defined themselves. It is the chronology of events outlined above which marks the transmission of the kind of work originally seen during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to London and more widely to the rest of Britain. Today there are also Fringe Festivals in Toronto, New York and Hollywood, California.

Jeff Nuttall (1933-2004), who was an original staff contributor to the *International Times* from its founding in 1966, also co-founded the People Show with his neighbour Mark Long in 1966. Nuttall wrote and acted with the People Show for five years including the period when it was based at the Drury Lane Arts Lab (Anon, *Guardian*, 2004). The People Show was – and was intended to be – an important catalyst in the performance art movement and incorporated American arts forms such as ‘Happenings’, Jazz and oral verse inspired by members of the Beat generation of poets such as William Burroughs. Nuttall detailed an important generational shift in *Bomb Culture* (1968), a manifesto intended to capture the spirit of the post-Hiroshima generation which came of age after World War II and was burdened with the existential threat posed by the cold war. *Bomb Culture* was also a chronicle of the emerging counterculture in Britain (Miles 2010: 235).

### *1967 and the founding of the Drury Lane Arts Lab*

As noted earlier, after highly successful engagements organised in collaboration with the Traverse Theatre, the La MaMa Troupe directed by Tom O’Horgan performed *Futz* at the Mercury Theatre in Notting Hill and then *Tom Paine* at the Vaudeville Theatre in London’s West End. The Open Theatre directed by Joseph Chaikin performed *America Hurrah* at the Royal Court. The summer of 1967 would later be referred to as the ‘American Summer’ (Ansorge 1975: 22). As John Arden stated at the time:

What they have managed to do with both *Futz* and *Tom Paine* is to arouse a quite remarkable degree of excitement among informed and receptive theatre workers in the city. La MaMa Troupe's visit here is going to have a very great effect upon the work done in England over the next few years. I know my own writing is already being influenced considerably. (Bottoms 2004: 202)

Following the work of American experimental companies in London during the summer of 1967 Haynes, as noted above, started the Arts Lab during August 1967 in a warehouse at the top of Drury Lane. It ran from Drury Lane at the front to facing the City Lit building at the back with three floors. The warehouse was converted into a variety of spaces for art exhibitions, theatre performances, music and cinema. This multi-media laboratory and centre of fertilisation only lasted for fifteen months but in that time introduced a new generation of writers, directors and actors who would go on to produce work of national and international significance. Important groups emerging from the Drury Lane Arts Lab onto the British theatrical landscape included Freehold, Portable Theatre, Pip Simmons Group, London La MaMa and the People Show. Nonetheless, Lord Goodman, then Chairman of the Arts Council, would not allow the Arts Council to support the Drury Lane Arts Lab because of its perceived drug culture.

As soon as the People Show got the keys to the Drury Lane Arts Lab building, and before anything else was done to it, they presented a production with cages. (They also did future productions at the Drury Lane Arts Lab.) The main building was a gallery. The cinema in the basement had no seats, just foam rubber to sit on. The first floor housed the restaurant and was also used for site-specific work. The back included dressing rooms and was also where Haynes lived. People lived and stayed in different spaces. Without any announcement the Drury Lane Arts Lab opened, and through word of mouth became a popular success with people coming from all over Europe to see it. Haynes sent duplicate letters out to those



included in *Who's Who in Theatre* and key figures in cinema asking them to be Patrons for £50 a year. Membership was £2 or £5 and for students £1. £30,000 was raised that way and Peter Brook and Tom Stoppard were Patrons. The current equivalent of this amount would be approximately between £446,800 and £872,100, depending on the inflator used. This demonstrates that, as in Scotland, Haynes was able to raise considerable amounts of money in England, despite his reputation as an anti-establishment rebel.

Jack Henry Moore ran the theatre in Drury Lane and lived there. David Curtis ran the cinema and his wife Biddy Pippin, with Pamela Zoline, ran the gallery. Steven Berkoff became involved in the Drury Lane Arts Lab early on and asked Haynes to let him have a space where he then produced his first show, *Metamorphosis* by Kafka. Tuesday night was an open night when Arts Lab would show work that people brought in. There were lots of French films and New York underground films. People came from all over the world to see what Arts Lab was up to.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono had an exhibition in the gallery in August 1968 as a German television crew interviewed Haynes about the Drury Lane Arts Lab. The film crew asked to interview them too. After the German broadcast, hundreds of backpackers started coming over from Germany to experience the Drury Lane Arts Lab. This began a change of audience at the Arts Lab. When Arts Lab started, the average audience age of its audience was around thirty, although mixed, There after audiences became much younger and Arts Lab began to feel like a youth club. This had the effect of keeping away a mixture of ages and a greater cross-section of the public (Haynes, 2011, DWIC).

A pervasive anti-Vietnam War sentiment at the time was expressed through plays, demonstrations and articles. People on the run asked to be hidden (Haynes, 2009, UH). Many potential draftees were illegally in Britain. You could stay in Britain for three months on a

US passport and many people just did not leave. Jack Henry Moore, for example, was never living legally in Britain. He spoke Dutch, German and French and was for many years a consultant to U.N.E.S.C.O. holding a U.N.E.S.C.O. passport. Moore received financial support from the Dutch government for a project called 'Bank' which was a video library. Someone reported him to the tax authorities and the project was shut down (Haynes 2009, UH).

Perhaps the most important single production at the Drury Lane Arts Lab was *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven* in 1969 by the writer, director and actor Jane Arden. The production employed multi-media effects and used surreal and mystical montage in exploring a woman's attempt to come to terms with the sense of inferiority imposed on her by patriarchal society. A substantial number of people came together for it, including Jane Arden, Jack Bond, Sheila Allen and Victor Spinetti who already knew each other. There was an enthusiastic response from the underground audiences and glitterati and when it finished at the Drury Lane Arts Lab, Marowitz offered it a home at the Open Space but it never moved. Haynes feels that Jack Bond and Jane Arden wanted a higher profile venue (Haynes, 2009, UH). John Calder published *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven*.

The people who actually ran the Drury Lane Arts Lab lived there or nearby. There were no formal meetings and initially the publicity was mainly through the *International Times*. Then other papers picked up on Arts Lab activities and publicity spread by word of mouth. The Cinema only held sixty to eighty people and the theatre audience capacity depended on the particular configuration. Padded beer crates were kept outside and when people bought their tickets they carried their seats in with them. Tickets were very cheap and often if people could not pay they were passed in for free. The rich and famous on the other hand were expected to pay. The restaurant took in money but there was no alcohol licence.

There was an empty hotel a few doors down from the Drury Lane Arts Lab which Lab participants seized and housed with homeless people. Eventually the police poured cement into the drains and it was possibly the first squatters' seizure in London. At the weekends people who came from outside of London would stay in the cinema and gallery overnight. The actors in *Hair* auditioned and rehearsed at the Drury Lane Arts Lab. The Drury Lane Arts Lab could quite justly represent itself as the focal point of the underground. As already noted, it failed to get the endorsement of Arts Council Chairman Arnold Goodman but it did have the informal support of the government Arts Minister Jenny Lee.

Many commentators identify the Drury Lane Arts Lab as the very birthplace of the alternative theatre movement in Britain (Ansorge 1975, Itzin 1980, Kershaw 1992) and by 1977 there were over 170 community-based, multi-media Arts Labs scattered throughout the Britain. While other Arts Labs started up in Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere, Nicholas Albery created *The Arts Labs News* which gave an update on the arts labs' activities every two or three months. The proliferation of activity at the Arts Lab was a direct result of Haynes's policies. The Drury Lane Arts Lab did not practice artistic vetting and precisely for this reason provided a free space for young artists and groups of artists such as Freehold and Pip Simmons to experiment and develop their respective voices. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe had pioneered this practice, since its foundation in 1947, and so may have influenced Haynes's approach by example. Further the Drury Lane Arts Lab quickly became one of the most influential multi-media centres in the entire world. Many television stations throughout Europe and Japan made programmes about the Drury Lane Arts Lab (Haynes 1984: 151). The Drury Lane Arts Lab created a timetabled space to try new things out free from the commercial constraints of having to please an audience. It also encouraged widespread participation and facilitated participatory performance practices which became a characteristic of the alternative theatre in Britain (Haynes 1984:151).

It is important to note how the 'gathering phase' and 'dispersal phase' as defined by Kershaw (Kershaw 1992) were organised differently for the audience than in a traditional British theatre. The Drury Lane Arts Lab had a deliberately informal atmosphere and was a meeting place for many. The various spaces within the Drury Lane Arts Lab were constantly changing, dependent on the showing currently offered. Whatever happened to be showing during any given day or evening was displayed on a blackboard near the front entrance. The audience was not seated in a conventional manner but sat on mats or crates placed on the floor. All of these factors contributed to a collapse of traditional hierarchies within the activities at the Drury Lane Arts Lab. In this way the Drury Lane Arts Lab facilitated efficacious radical performance and ideological transaction which may reasonably be presumed to have brought about essential changes in the audiences' perceptions. This in turn may have had an impact on the spectators' future relationship with society; in any case it had an immediate effect on their cultural experience.

Haynes ran the Drury Lane Arts Lab from 1967 to 1969 but at the end there were problems with police raids because of the drug-taking on the premises and because Haynes had also started the controversial magazine *SUCK*. There was also a lack of financial control and the money that Haynes raised had been spent.

It is ironic, then, that the venue which has often been credited as the birthplace of the alternative theatre was very short-lived. The American expatriate Jim Haynes opened the Drury Lane Arts Lab in 1968, and it has now achieved legendary status as a kind of creative crucible for its times (Kershaw 1992: 100).

### *1968-1969*

Haynes's activities at this time were somewhat scattergun in their approach. He engaged multiple performance spaces. In 1968 Haynes hired the Albert Hall for a fundraiser,

originally to star Leonard Cohen. He could not attend but John Lennon, Yoko Ono and others did. Someone in the audience began to strip. When the officials tried to remove her, others joined in. It was later called *The Alchemical Wedding*. A second venue was The UFO Space in Charing Cross Road. UFO Space was an Irish drinking club and one night a week it was dark. Haynes persuaded UFO's owners to let him hire it for that one night. UFO Space became *the* London underground meeting place. Pink Floyd and Soft Machine were launched there. There were market stalls, poster shops and an *IT* stand. UFO Space ran smoothly until the *News of the World* published a negative article on it. Haynes had a third performance space. He got the key from the estate agents to a property underneath the corner of Tottenham Court Road, Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street. He hosted late night parties with bands in an enormous space that was bigger than the Roundhouse. The Living Theatre did an event there and Dick Gregory, the African-American comic, did an event for 300 to 400 people. Dick Gregory was then also a Presidential candidate and Haynes was his Europe campaign manager.

After the Drury Lane Arts Lab closed Haynes moved between Paris and Amsterdam. He set up the sexual freedom newspaper *Suck* and directed the White Dream Film Festival in Amsterdam. He believed that sexual images by definition were not obscene. For him, obscenity is hunger, no shelter, and violence, but not sexual imagery. If such imagery brings pleasure to the people involved as it amounts to a social contract others cannot contest. That was the point he says he was trying to make (Haynes, 2009, UH). Haynes finds pornography boring but erotica stimulating and exciting. It was his idea to start *Suck*, recruiting Germaine Greer, Heathcote Williams, Bill Levy, Sarah Jensen, Susanne Brögger and Lynn Tillman as contributors. Germaine Greer was a jury member at the White Dream Film Festival. About a dozen issues of *Suck* were published, as was a book. Festivals took place. All made an impact at the time and led Haynes to have tea with Salvador Dali.

Haynes went to live in Paris in late 1969 at the same time that he started *Suck* in Amsterdam. He had developed a relationship with certain Parisian professors who brought groups of students over to both the Traverse and then the Drury Lane Arts Lab. He received an invitation to be a visiting professor at a new experimental University in Paris, the University at Vincennes (Paris 8), later relocated to St Denis, teaching sexual politics. Haynes said he could not speak French and they said he could teach in English. He taught at Vincennes for thirty years as a founding staff member.

### *Conclusion*

It is important to put Jim Haynes's enormous impact in context. In Edinburgh, for example, individual initiatives had turned the general artistic legacy of World War II into something important to many. The Edinburgh International Festival of Music and the Arts was launched in 1947. In the same year, around the mainstream festival venues, a 'fringe' emerged involving eight theatre groups which performed for three weeks during the summer festival. This, which became called in time the Fringe, started as a protest because Unity Theatre had been excluded from the 'main' festival. A coordinating body called the Fringe Society was founded immediately after the festival in 1958 and was fully in operation for the festival of 1959. Edinburgh already had a long established literary culture which was mainly focused on certain pubs. Edinburgh University enrolled a cosmopolitan student population and there was a then independent and innovative Art College. Eventually, though, there was a longing for a permanent home in which the excitement and experimental work of the Festival could be prolonged throughout the year. This was the basis on which the Traverse Theatre and Gallery were founded. Haynes may have been in the right place at the right time, but his talent and influence ensured that his legacy would reach far, wide and deep. That this was quickly recognised can be seen in Harold Hobson's words when he announced he would leave the Traverse:

I cannot think of any happier preliminary to the 1966 Festival than that Mr Haynes should be asked to reconsider his resignation. It is, I repeat, a matter of international importance in the theatre. - Harold Hobson  
(Moffat 1978: 60)

The Traverse Theatre itself was one of the most important sub-cultural developments of its time. Without Jim Haynes it would almost certainly never have achieved the role or importance it developed. Haynes's influence, as we have seen, reached far wider audiences after he left the Traverse. Many of those he influenced and supported remain key contributors to alternative British theatre.

As mentioned previously many identify the Drury Lane Arts Lab as the very birthplace of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. This study does not agree with such an absolute assertion, but argues that the significance of the Drury Lane Arts Lab is hard to overstate. Drury Lane Arts Lab was similar to the Traverse in that Haynes brought together in it a wide variety of activities including theatre, music, poetry and visual art. Perhaps most importantly, Drury Lane Arts Lab was a space which created an intersection between ideas and creative individuals. In bringing these elements together Haynes created a seedbed for the germination of new personal associations, collaborations and new forms of creative output. If performance is being considered in cultural, social and political spheres, there is no doubt the Arts Lab was highly efficacious. If pursuing the theme of such efficacy, we now turn our attention to Haynes's close friend and collaborator, Charles Marowitz.

### Chapter Six: Charles Marowitz

This chapter considers the impact and influence of Charles Marowitz's theatre practice on alternative theatre in Britain during his London period 1956 – 1980. Specifically, the chapter looks at Marowitz's influence in the establishment of the London Fringe and in expanding the parameters of alternative theatre engagement with British society during this time period. Marowitz reinvigorated the classics by rigorously bending and stretching masterpieces in the form of free adaptations and collages. Furthermore, this chapter considers certain controversies associated with Marowitz which impacted on the parameters of censorship in Britain both before and after the Theatres Act of 1968. This portion of the thesis seeks to analyse and discuss these developments within the broader context of American influence on alternative British Theatre 1956 - 1980.

During the early 1950s Marowitz considered American life to be dominated by superficiality and conformity. He was drafted by the US Army during the Korean War but ended up spending two years stationed in France. He believed French culture could have a civilising influence upon him and began to imagine that he would have a more meaningful life in Europe. In due course he endeavoured to find a drama academy in France that he would be able to attend. However, there were no G.I. Bill approved drama schools in France whereas in England there were approved drama schools in both Glasgow and London. Marowitz opted to train at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in the hope that he would be able to return to France on a regular basis.

The life and career of the late Charles Marowitz (1932–2014) of course did not occur in isolation but within a complex fabric of associations with a wide range of individuals, institutions and communities. During his London period from 1956 to 1980 Marowitz's theatre practice and criticism were influential in injecting radical creativity into the British theatre. Marowitz's work revolved around utilising aesthetic and intellectual tools to upset



the status quo. Marowitz agitated conventional British theatre at the time by reinvigorating the classics, writing irreverent theatre criticism and fulfilling the inherent nature of alternative theatre in helping to establish what might be seen a dialectical relationship between the alternative sector and the commercial theatre establishment. This abrasion had the effect of shaking things loose, calling various received notions into question and generally turning accepted ideas on their heads. For better or for worse Marowitz's abrasion also expressed itself in his personality and affected his working relationships with various collaborators. Through analysis of a series of key events, theatrical influences and personal associations a cumulative portrait of Charles Marowitz's contribution to British alternative theatre will emerge.

During the earlier period of his career Marowitz was caught up in prevailing theatrical preoccupations of the day, During the 1960s his theatrical temperament transformed from an interest in applying Stanislavski's methodology to the ideas of Artaud whom he first read in 1958. In his own sensibility Marowitz shifted away from socially committed plays and ideology to an emphasis on aesthetic innovation and metaphysical exploration. In particular when he was working with the Traverse he found that there was a predominant emphasis on new writing. He decided that no amount of new writing would really change theatre itself or free it from a state of aesthetic obsolescence so he began to search for new forms and techniques which would transcend the mundane and the temporal (Marowitz 1973: 8-9). He became committed to the creation of a collective instrument based around the idea of a permanent company. Working collectively in collaboration with a director but without specific reference to a single playwright *per se* would, in his view, by virtue of its artistic chemistry, create a new and original kind of artistic specimen that was more efficacious than the written word itself (Marowitz, Interview, 2011). It was in order to realise this vision that Marowitz originally collaborated with Peter Brook on the Theatre of Cruelty season in 1964,

which effectively popularised the ideas of Artaud within British theatre. He later created the Open Space Theatre Company in 1968 which was the only example in Britain of a laboratory company run on a repertory basis. Marowitz's development in this direction started with his experience of the Group Theatre and the emergence of the 'American Method' or rather American derivations of Stanislavski. In particular, Stanislavski-based improvisational techniques were an important formative influence on Marowitz.

### *Early Years*

Marowitz was raised in poverty, the third child of exclusively Yiddish-speaking Polish immigrants, on the Lower East Side of New York City and at the age of sixteen read *The Fervent Years* (1950) by Harold Clurman. Clurman detailed the troubled history of the Group Theatre (1931-1941). In 1950, while still in high school Marowitz became the youngest theatre critic for the newly formed *Village Voice* and experienced first-hand the advent of the Off Broadway movement. Greenwich Village, where Marowitz spent his youth, was also the site of Off Broadway Theatres. 'Off Broadway' was a geographical demarcation but also had roots in definitions of the alternative theatre movement in America (Aronson 2000). At the age of seventeen Marowitz founded his own acting company on the Lower East Side of New York. Later, after his move to London and the end of his studies at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in 1957, and the Central School of Speech and Drama in 1958, he began to teach a workshop for British actors based on the principles and practices of the American Method.

### *London*

At the age of twenty-four Charles Marowitz moved to London, during the summer of 1956. Continental influences as well as new American drama were beginning to open new possibilities for the future direction of the British Theatre (Shellard 1999: 17). Along with the

work of Ionesco and Adamov and the London premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in 1955 at the Arts Theatre, Joan Littlewood's productions of Brecht promised change in theatre subject matter and practices. These productions were followed by the London tour of the Berliner Ensemble in the autumn of 1956. On 8 May 1956, *Look Back in Anger* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre. Though the fact is not discussed nearly as much, the previous month, April 1956, also saw the Royal Court produce the London premiere of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

The Suez crisis as well as the Hungarian uprising in 1956 led to reverberations in British society including the emergence of the 'New Left' which was later to have an impact on politically inclined alternative theatre and performance (Itzin 1980). Other factors such as the growing power of young people, changes in family relationships and new standards of sexual behavior would lead to widespread social upheaval in the two decades which followed. As a relative outsider Marowitz became conscious of certain tendencies within British culture. He found people obsessed with class identity. He found a society in the midst of radical change, given dissent, anti-establishment fervour and new trends which were convulsing British culture. He also found American influence to be pervasive in such areas as music and cinema. Later on, the Vietnam protest movement and drug use among the younger generation (Marowitz 1990: 2-3) were further indicators he witnessed.

According to Marowitz, he became aware at L.A.M.D.A. for the first time of the British as opposed to the American approach to acting. He developed a perception that the British approach was somewhat weighted towards voice and movement. And he found that, from his point of view, the British approach at the time was almost exclusively concerned with externals, uninterested in the concept of inner technique (Rebellato 1999: 78). In his view Stanislavsky was given mindless lip service. Only one class at L.A.M.D.A. theoretically touched on his ideas, a bi-weekly improvisation session. Marowitz considered these sessions

to be a travesty of Method work, consisting exclusively of improvisations of little playlets worked up by the students under the instructor's supervision. When some of the other American students who were already versed in the Method suggested that the work they were doing was devoid of appropriate actions, subtext and palpable contact, the instructor did not appear to understand or be versed in the terminology they were using (Marowitz 1990: 14-15). Marowitz became bitterly disillusioned at L.A.M.D.A. as did two of his American classmates who left the course. Marowitz wanted to follow suit but had he done so he would have lost his G.I. Bill subsidy and would have had to return to the United States, which he was unwilling to do.

Marowitz considered the training at L.A.M.D.A. to be backward, although he did encounter some interesting work on verse technique and he was exposed to the habits of established British classical theatre practitioners. He found that acting was thought to be merely a mode of projecting language and physical technique. In his view the school was – intellectually and artistically – a kind of British feeder for the West End theatre establishment and he felt himself becoming increasingly anti-social. Marowitz decided to branch out into the London theatre itself and directed his first theatre production in Britain at the London Unity Theatre. He directed a production of his own adaptation of Gogol's comedy *Marriage* and the production received a favourable notice in *The Times* (Marowitz 1990: 17). Marowitz was then asked to work on a Living Newspaper called *World on Edge* being devised at Unity in November 1956 on the subject of the recent Suez crisis and the Hungarian uprising (Chambers 1989: 340-345).

Shortly after that production Marowitz started a Method workshop at Unity Theatre which he used to introduce a number of English actors to the principles and ideas of Stanislavsky although Unity had run a Stanislavsky based school in the late 1930s (Chambers 1989: 361). He also developed his own exercises and ideas. Marowitz decided that instead of using

material such as Clifford Odets, Gorky and Arthur Miller he would use Shakespeare, Marlowe and Webster (Marowitz 1990: 17). After one year at L.A.M.D.A. Marowitz transferred to the Central School of Speech and Drama but found his experience there to be very similar to that at L.A.M.D.A. and after his G.I. Bill subsidy ran out, the Method workshop became his primary source of income. He immersed himself as much as possible in the study and practice of Stanislavsky but found that applying this practice to texts by Shakespeare, Marlowe and Webster was problematic just as others such as Michel St Denis had found before him. Marowitz soon became associated with the Method label and at the age of twenty-nine, wrote his first book entitled *The Method as Means* (1961).

### *In-Stage*

Marowitz read Artaud for the first time during 1958 and also began writing criticism for the *Encore Reader* magazine, the theatrical bi-monthly publication, which was originally started by Clive Goodwin in 1954 (Marowitz, Milne, Hale eds. 1965). Also in 1958 Marowitz persuaded the British Drama League to allow him to convert a rooftop studio at Fitzroy Square in London into his own experimental theatre which he then called 'In-Stage' (Miles 2010: 125). At In-Stage Marowitz attempted to define a non-naturalistic style, building on the theories of the early Absurdist and Surrealists. This effort involved essentially a paring down of language as far as possible while establishing an ingrained awareness of what things are essentially, rather than what they seem to be on the surface. Marowitz's experimental work was intended to run in parallel with classical theatre productions and commercial theatre, and was warmly received by the critic Alan Pryce-Jones of *The Observer* (Marowitz 1990: 19-20). In-Stage went on to produce a play by J.B. Lynne called *The Trigon* with performances by Timothy West and Prunella Scales. *The Trigon* transferred to Brighton and then the Arts Theatre Club. At In-Stage Marowitz also mounted the British premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words II*, Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck* and William Saroyan's

*The Cave Dwellers*. In-Stage was also the first theatre in Britain to produce works by the playwright Murray Schisgal. This was the period immediately before Marowitz's affinity for Artaud found expression in his theatre practice.

Before long – one can never date these things but it was around the early Sixties - I realized I had been blinded by Strasberg in precisely the same way he had been conned by Stanislavski, and that in some kind of prophetic way, my attempt to apply Method to classics was really an indication of an entirely different temperament, one which found its realisation in the ideas of Artaud (Hewison 1986: 90-91).

At the In-Stage theatre at Fitzroy Square spectators would line up in a small room below the rooftop studio where they were offered tea and biscuits by Marowitz's friend and collaborator Gillian Watt. When the show was about to start audience members would move in single file up the narrow staircase that led to the tiny platform stage. Marowitz would often be backstage working the lights and sound tape. After the performance the audience would file out and Gillian Watt would stand at the bottom of the staircase holding a wicker basket into which members of the audience would drop coins and sometimes notes. At In-Stage the actors received no wages and the audience paid no admission, which was also a characteristic of many contemporaneous Off Off Broadway theatres in New York (Crespy 2003). The productions were both offbeat and highbrow as were the audiences. Many of the audience members were readers of *The New Statesman* which, along with the British Drama League magazine, were the only publications In-Stage could afford to advertise in. The audiences at In-Stage formed the beginnings of a new theatre-going public, a public which would eventually patronise places such as the Roundhouse, UFO, Ambiance, Soho Poly, the Oval House and the Open Space. These were the forerunners of what would eventually become the London Fringe.

*Theatre of Cruelty*

When Marowitz arrived in London in 1956 he was still writing and reviewing regularly for *The Village Voice* which first coined the term 'Off Off Broadway' in 1960. As discussed, once in London Marowitz started writing for *The Encore Reader* as well. In fact *The Encore Reader* was what originally brought Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz together as they were both regular contributors (Marowitz 1990: 81). One of the first productions Marowitz had seen after moving to Britain was Peter Brook's 1957 production of *Titus Andronicus* at Stratford-upon-Avon, which Marowitz reviewed for the *Village Voice*. In the review Marowitz stated, 'A short scalene-shaped man named Peter Brook, aged 33, is the greatest director in England' (Marowitz 1990: 81). One of the things which had attracted Marowitz to the *Encore* publication was its association with Brook. Marowitz wrote a letter to Brook and invited him to a production he was directing at In-Stage of *A Little Something for the Maid* by Ray Abell. Brook attended. Afterwards Brook and Marowitz met in London and then again in Paris where Brook originally introduced Marowitz to the idea of collaborating on the 1962 production of *King Lear* with Paul Scofield and then later on an experimental season with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Together Brook and Marowitz were primarily responsible for the injection of Artaud's ideas into contemporary theatre practice (Kershaw 1992: 103). During 1963/64 Charles Marowitz and Peter Brook put Artaud's ideas to the test with the Royal Shakespeare Company Experimental Group/Theatre of Cruelty at L.A.M.D.A. Initially Brook brought Marowitz into the RSC as his assistant on the famous 1962 production of *King Lear* and it was through that relationship that the Theatre of Cruelty group came about (Chambers 2004: 152). The group's stated intention was 'to explore certain problems of acting and stagecraft in laboratory conditions, without the commercial pressures of public performance' (Cole and Chinoy 1970: 430). This was the first full-fledged experimental project of its kind in Britain. Artaud saw the conventional use of language in theatre as a means of repressing society (Sontag in

Artaud 1988: np). Artaud's emphasis on non-verbal communication through movement and sound has influenced a trend in contemporary British theatre towards prioritising the body over conventional literary interpretation.

It was Marowitz's job during the first three months of the *Theatre of Cruelty* project to devise a series of exercises by which the actors' untapped creativity could be accessed (Burns 1972: 178-179). This involved an effort to engage with areas of the actors' minds and bodies which lay beneath, inaccessible to the conventional naturalistic techniques on which contemporary actors predominantly based their performances. Marowitz believed that Stanislavsky's most important discovery was the notion of 'subtext'. Behind surface existence was something resembling a complex of needs, drives, symbols and unformulated emotions which existed in the realm Artaud described as 'that fragile fluctuating centre which forms never reach' (Marowitz 1990: 85-86). The exercises Marowitz invented were intended to penetrate the realm of the actors' primitive drives. They were designed to coax the actor into sounds, movements, spatial metaphors and non-verbal improvisations which potentially derived from a place where individual human communication originates.

During the period when the *Theatre of Cruelty* was being formed it was also Marowitz's job to audition actors who might join the experimental company (as distinct from the main RSC). Marowitz looked for actors who were open enough to accommodate highly unorthodox techniques. Instead of seeing actors on a one-to-one basis, Marowitz worked out a system of collective auditions whereby groups of eight and ten would interact with one another through improvisations, nonsense texts and various theatre games engineered to test both their imaginations and their critical temperament. One of the actors who auditioned was then an unknown actor named Glenda Jackson. After her work with the RSC Experimental Group Jackson went on to become a prominent star of stage and screen, receiving two Academy



Awards for Best Actress before she turned to politics, serving as a long-time Labour MP, representing Hampstead and Highgate in north London.

Unlike a traditional rehearsal process which begins after actors have already been cast in particular roles, the Theatre of Cruelty's creative process involved Marowitz and Brook putting the actors through a series of tests and exercises which primarily included improvisations and games in which actors' personal imaginations were constantly being provoked into outward expression. The showing of the company's work was a kind of surrealist vaudeville selection (Hewison 1986: 91). Pieces explored psychic interiors and the extremes of performance with wild bouts of violence and cruelty (Davies 1987: 159) while incorporating a variety of authors' work (including John Arden, Shakespeare, Paul Ableman, Alain Robbe-Grillet and others).

It was also during this season that Marowitz first wrote and directed his twenty-eight minute version of the collage *Hamlet* which was later expanded to eighty minutes. Marowitz's eighty-minute version of his collage *Hamlet* was first produced with In-Stage for the Literarisches Colloquium, Berlin, at the Akademie der Kunste in 1965. It went on to the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre in London in 1966 (Schiele 2005: 3). The company also presented a version of Genet's *The Screens* at the Donmar Studio, established in 1961 by West End producer Donald Albery as a rehearsal space for his production company Donmar Productions (whose name is derived from the first three letters of his name and that of his wife, Margaret) and the RSC turned into a theatre called The Warehouse (Chambers 2004: 72). Later, the company of eighteen actors was integrated into the main Royal Shakespeare Company and went on to utilise the language and techniques developed during the Theatre of Cruelty for the 1965 production of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*, directed by Peter Brook. Marowitz was offered a permanent position with the company but he turned it down because he did not want to become trapped in Brook's shadow.

### *Controversy in Glasgow*

On opening night in December 1965 the Board of the Glasgow Citizens Theatre cancelled a production of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* to be held in its studio, the Close Theatre, and directed by Marowitz. A full audience was in attendance. Marowitz had put together a new adaptation drawing a parallel between Dr. Faustus and J. Robert Oppenheimer. His version was intended to provide insight into Faustus who experiments with forbidden knowledge and Oppenheimer, the scientist who arguably transgressed against the permissible bounds of human endeavour in being primarily responsible for the creation of the atomic bomb. Such had been the impetus for previous productions such as Theatre Workshop's *Uranium 235* and *Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht. Faustus was dressed like a modern university science research scholar and sat at a desk with modern lab equipment. Mephistopheles was portrayed as a government defense chief who appropriates scientists for the purpose of obtaining military dominance.

Since the adaptation had been given a modern setting the Seven Deadly Sins needed to be appropriately reinterpreted. Marowitz decided to identify each of the Seven Deadly Sins with a caricature mask of a different modern head of state. For Sloth he chose a mask of Queen Elizabeth II. At the final preview the chairman of the management committee at the theatre in which the production was to open objected to the caricature on the grounds that it was in bad taste and would be offensive to members of a Scottish audience. He insisted that the Queen was not slothful and in fact worked very hard on state occasions, on diplomatic visits and at local and regional events. Marowitz pointed out that the work was not in fact personal to the Queen but that she herself was symbolic of a certain class in British society which many perceived as slothful, living on inherited incomes, lounging around in huge mansions and holding aristocratic titles.

The next day the chairman of the management committee as well as other members of the theatre's board confronted Marowitz and asked him if he would delete the impersonation of the Queen. Marowitz insisted that to do so would mean that the production would have only Six Deadly Sins and that the committee's suggestion seemed so incredible that he was unable to give it any real credence. The night of the premiere the press and the theatre's subscribers were in the audience. Shortly before the performance was due to begin the chairman of the management committee, Michael Goldberg, rose to address the audience. He announced that the performance was to be cancelled due to differences between the director and the committee of management. He said that the director of the production had introduced an impersonation of Queen Elizabeth II personifying Sloth. This in the opinion of the management committee was needlessly and gratuitously offensive. Since the director was unwilling to modify the scene the management committee felt it had no alternative but to cancel the performance.

Marowitz, who was in the audience, rose and protested that what the management committee was doing was an outrageous act of censorship. Marowitz suggested that Marlowe's own intention with the Seven Deadly Sins had been satirical and that he did not see why he himself should not be allowed the same license which Marlowe himself used in writing the play over 300 years earlier. A senior board member shouted that the director should have some sense of responsibility toward the committee since it had rescued the theatre financially, a theatre that was losing money and was dependent on public support. Marowitz responded that if they were to cancel the production it would only lose money for the theatre.

Furthermore the Close Theatre was a club theatre created (on the model of the Traverse Theatre) with the original intention of avoiding the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain.

Marowitz picked up his jacket and walked out, declaring that he was quitting the production.

The following day the cancellation of the production was headline news in newspapers throughout Scotland and England. News of the cancellation appeared on the front page of *The Scotsman*, *The Glasgow Herald* and the *Daily Mail*, among other broadsheet newspapers.

There then followed a series of meetings between the theatre's directors, members of the board and ultimately the chairman and Marowitz himself. At that point everyone was anxious to find a compromise, although Marowitz continued to refuse to remove the scene in question. Marowitz suggested that they replace the Queen's tiara with Britannia's helmet. This was the necessary concession that allowed the production to go forward. The controversy had the effect of generating a large amount of publicity which then led to a sell-out run. Ironically the controversy helped to enlarge the bank account of a theatre badly in need of box-office revenue at the time. During the controversy Marowitz demonstrated again his ability to hit a nerve centre of sensibility in Britain and thereby generate widespread discussion about theatre's boundaries which in turn ultimately has the potential to enact a degree of change.

### *London Traverse*

The Glasgow Citizen's Theatre controversy was not Marowitz's first intervention in Scottish theatre. Following Marowitz's participation in the landmark *Happening* during the 1963 Edinburgh Drama Conference, he and Jim Haynes, who had helped sponsor the conference, began to collaborate. In 1964 Marowitz persuaded Saul Bellow to allow him to direct three one-act plays Bellow had written, at the Traverse Theatre club in Edinburgh. The programme became known as *The Bellow Plays* and later transferred to the Fortune Theatre in London. Also in 1964 Marowitz directed Jack Richardson's *Gallows Humour* at the Traverse during the Edinburgh Festival. In 1965 he also directed Peter Barnes's first work entitled *Sclerosis* and Peter Weiss's play *A Night with Guests* at the Traverse in Edinburgh (McMillan 1988: 105 – 110). As the previous chapter has outlined, Haynes believed that in order to maximise the trajectory of the Traverse's work, both in terms of prospective talent as well as finance, a

London venue needed to be directly linked with the Traverse in Edinburgh so successful productions could transfer. After a prohibitively expensive season of work at the Arts Theatre Haynes relocated the venture to the Jeanetta Cochrane in London in 1966 and asked Marowitz to be associate director (Hewison: 1986: 112).

In 1966-1967 Marowitz directed Joe Orton's *Loot* at the London Traverse, which received the Evening Standard Award for Best Play of the Year. Previously the play had had a difficult run in the regions. Nonetheless Marowitz was approached by producers Michael White and Oscar Lewenstein about the play in 1966 while he was working as a director with the London Traverse. During the regional run the cast sensed that audiences were not engaging with the material and so they began to add one-liners and inject their own collective invention into the performance 'script'. When Marowitz was approached about doing the play at the London Traverse he asked to see the original version of the script and when he read it he was astonished by its sophisticated literary constructions and the subtle black comedy. He immediately agreed to stage the production during the London Traverse's first season and then worked on the script with Orton.

Marowitz's directorial approach to the play was to make social and moral excesses plausible, and to find the truth which lay deep within the material. The production opened in September 1966 and transferred to the Criterion Theatre in London's West End in January 1967. *Loot* ran for 342 performances (Shellard 1999: 127) but despite positive reviews the play continued to cause offended patrons to leave the theatre in the middle of the performance. Nevertheless the production achieved such a profile that during the West End run directed by Marowitz the producers also negotiated the film rights for the play. The production also became a point of reference during the 'dirty plays' controversy initiated by the impresario Emile Littler, a controversy based around collective hostility towards displays of nudity, promiscuity and most of all the representation of homosexuality (Marowitz 1990: 104-105). This can be seen

as evidence that Marowitz was involved with work that served to generate public discourse in Britain on controversial issues.

Ten months after the play opened, Orton was murdered in his sleep on 9 August 1967 by his lover Kenneth Halliwell who then committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills (Shellard 1999: 126). The murder-suicide was headline news and Marowitz was subsequently approached by numerous journalists and researchers interested in any insights he could provide about Orton. Although Marowitz and Orton did not particularly like each other on a personal level (Marowitz 1990: 109), they shared a similar irreverence and hostility towards the British establishment which found expression in their collaborative work together.

### *Open Space*

In 1968 Marowitz opened the Open Space Theatre on Tottenham Court Road in collaboration with Thelma Holt (Hewison 1986: 200), described by Marowitz as a young actor and producer who had recently completed training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Marowitz 1974: 7-10). In fact, at this time, Holt (b. 1932) was a successful actor. One is reminded in this case of the necessity of cross-checking information given by interviewees, where memory may be faulty or information skewed by personal bias, lack of knowledge or, indeed, affected by self-mythologisation. According to Marowitz, and verifiably, Marowitz first met Holt when she was acting in Leonid Andreyev's play *He Who Gets Slapped* at the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1964. Marowitz says he explained that he wanted to create a permanent home for a small resident company and mount experimental and unorthodox theatre and performance, including works which were not plays necessarily but collaborations collectively devised by a permanent ensemble. Holt was interested, according to Marowitz but only on the basis that she would have an active managerial role in the new theatre. In fact, there was more of a time-gap than Marowitz remembered between the initial meeting and the

opening of the theatre. This is hardly surprising since the plans could hardly have been conceived on a first meeting after a performance when he first met Holt. The theatre actually opened four years after their first meeting and over the next twelve years the Open Space would become one of the leading experimental theatres in Britain and introduce new works by such British playwrights as Howard Barker, Trevor Griffiths, Howard Brenton, Peter Barnes, David Rudkin, John Hopkins and Mike Leigh. The Open Space would also introduce new work to the British theatre by many important American playwrights including Sam Shepard, John Guare, Terence McNally, Lawrence Melfi, Charles Ludlam, Mike Weller as well as work by Jean Claude van Itallie.

During the first four years of the Open Space's existence from 1968 to 1971, nineteen out of thirty-three productions were American plays (Schiele 2005: 56). Marowitz was interested in utilising the best material from Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway. Such material in addition to being novel material within a British context, was also written to be performed in very similar conditions to those provided at the Open Space. In his introduction to *Off Broadway Plays 2* Marowitz explained that 'The Open Space Theatre rapidly became a kind of extraterritorial Off Broadway outpost.' (Marowitz 1972: 10)

In many respects the Open Space was an Off Off Broadway Theatre in London. It hosted an American season of plays in 1969 and continued to premiere many more American plays to the exclusion of a number of talented British playwrights. Many of the groups explored throughout this study also performed at the Open Space, including La MaMa, Freehold and Pip Simmons (Schiele 2005: 210-216). The Open Space was known for environmental pieces, Shakespeare collages and premieres of new writing, including the world premiere in 1971 of *The Four Little Girls* by Pablo Picasso. This production is particularly interesting with regard to this study. Picasso and Artaud had been friends and Jinnie Schiele suggests it was this link with Artaud that, at least in part, piqued Marowitz's interest in the text (Schiele

2005: 53). If so, this interaction reflects a point made earlier that while this thesis deals with American influence on British alternative theatre, it also recognises that the interaction was two-way and that, within the general thesis being made here, there has also to be recognition that European experimentalism was also an important contributor to British alternative theatre through such figures as Artaud, not to mention others like Grotowski and, later, Kantor.

The first production presented at the Open Space, however, was *Fortune and Men's Eyes* by John Herbert. The play opened on 10 June 1968 and was set in a Canadian reformatory. The audience was ushered in through a fire exit instead of the main entrance and walked in single file through a narrow passage way on the iron fire escape. A metal door was opened by an armed guard who took the audience's tickets while two inmates stared silently from behind iron bars as the audience entered. Another guard with a submachine gun supervised from above. The audience was fingerprinted, and then ushered into a cell until twelve people were in each cell. Meanwhile loudspeakers blasted announcements related to prison life until the sound of a shower and the appearance of the four actors who were central to the play marked the beginning of the performance. The production was an attempt to break down the traditional barriers associated with a proscenium arch theatre and to implicate the audience directly in the action of the play. This can be seen as an instance of performance efficacy as the audience is made to adopt a role and is inculcated into a subjective view of a criminal justice scenario. This in turn had the potential to alter the individual audience member's view as it relates to the criminal justice system. Before the foundation of Open Space Marowitz had repeatedly stated that, in his view, there was no theatre movement in Britain which could be described as avant-garde. His fundamental concern was with breaking down the conventional presentation of character (Schiele 2005: 111). The run of the play was extended



at the Open Space until 4 October 1968. It transferred to the Comedy Theatre in London's West End on 17 October (Moffat 1978: 69).

The first productions of American plays at the Open Space were two one-acts both directed by Marowitz. One-act plays were characteristic of Off Off Broadway material dating back to Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* written in 1958. The first one act in the double bill at the Open Space was *The Fun War* by Geoffrey Bush, the second was *Muzeeka* by John Guare. Both works were anti-naturalistic in their dramaturgical composition. *The Fun War* was about the Spanish-American War. At its heart it was about the origins of a tendency in American foreign policy which had arguably led to many subsequent foreign interventions including ultimately the conflict in Vietnam. *Muzeeka* had been an Off Broadway award winner in 1967 and was about a young man destroyed by American society, American materialism and the Vietnam War. At the Open Space American national identity was directly challenged within a British context which had the potential to alter the British audience's view of political links or the 'special relationship' between the two countries at the time. After discovering that he enjoys killing, the young man then kills himself. During the performance four stage hands were used as props. They served as chairs for the cast to sit on and at times also joined in the action of the play (Schiele 2005: 57). These plays were also indicative of Marowitz's practice of using the Open Space to introduce the work of Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway playwrights to Britain.

Works known as the Marowitz Shakespeare collages which were produced at the Open Space included *A Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *An Othello*, *The Shrew*, *Measure for Measure* and *Variations on the Merchant of Venice* (Marowitz 1978: 7-27). Marowitz's intention in creating these works was primarily to confront the substructure of the plays in an attempt to test or challenge, revoke or destroy the foundations on which classical plays were revered and accepted. To accomplish this Marowitz challenged Shakespeare's presentation of theme and

character and altered it to suit his own interpretation or intentions. He objected to the reverence with which he believed these plays had been treated and endeavoured to extract something new and pertinent by breaking them into pieces and reassembling them in a particular way. Marowitz wanted to create a different vantage point and obtain an inside view of external developments which he believed would potentially alter the entire resonance of the theatrical experience. In challenging the institutionalisation of Shakespeare's canonical texts in Britain Marowitz sought to reinvigorate these works and redirect their potential efficacy within British culture and society in parallel with work his colleague Peter Brook was doing about the same time.

In addition to the Shakespeare collages Marowitz also adapted four additional works during his London period. Oscar Wilde's *The Critic as Artist* was adapted in 1971 and produced at the Tottenham Court Road space as was George Buchner's *Woyzeck* in 1973. In 1979 Marowitz adapted August Strindberg's *The Father* which was performed at the Euston Road premises, and *Hedda* based on *Hedda Gabler* in 1980 which was performed at the Roundhouse.

Marowitz's collage work and adaptations were inspired by the work of William Burroughs whom he cast as President Nixon in *Flash Gordon and the Angels* in 1970 (Miles 2010: 293) and again as Judge Hoffman in *The Chicago Conspiracy* (1971) both at the Open Space. They were also indicative of his lack of reverence for the classics which may have been a characteristic of many British-born theatre practitioners. The productions encompassed many different themes but share a common characteristic theme: the struggling individual bound by the strictures of conventional society and isolated from the rest of humankind because of a desire to break free from it. Both verbal and visual shock tactics were incorporated into performance as an integral part of the means of expression. Simple or bare sets were used to facilitate quick changes, and lighting was the chief means of design, suggesting a different

realm or reality from the real world, as in the use of gauze curtains and lighting effects in the *Critic as Artist*. Such design elements were utilised to remove the audience from the performance scenario by creating a dreamlike quality within the environment. Importantly Marowitz created an important and characteristic emphasis on speed. Speed generated a film-like technique in which the production would switch from one visual image to another unexpectedly and without rational explanation. This was intended to expose, through external expression, what was happening in the mind of a particular character as in a Hollywood movie.

The first Shakespeare collage to be produced at the Open Space was *A Macbeth*. The Wiesbaden Festival offered the Open Space £2500 to take the production to the Festival on the 14th and 15th of May 1969. There was a cast of eleven and the production design identified no specific period or location. The Marowitz adaptation stressed the occult and redistributed dialogue amongst a smaller number of characters than the original Shakespeare version, a characteristic of all of the Marowitz Shakespeare collages. Marowitz incorporated scenes of black magic ritual, shaping such ideas from the original. Lady Macbeth became the head of a witches' coven. The stage was a triangular platform intended as an emblem as was the shape of the gibbet. The gibbet appeared with the effigies of certain characters during black magic ritual scenes with the witches (Ellis, 2003). The floorboards were painted black. Drawbridge like structures served as entrances and exits at the back of the stage. Here we have an example of 'laying bare' which – conscious or not on the part of the theatre practitioners involved – is originally drawn from a Russian formalist conversion of text in to a series of devices.

During a blackout an effigy of Macbeth was set on stage. As the lights came up Thelma Holt, playing Lady Macbeth, was seen standing with her back to the audience in front of the effigy. The three witches entered and added pieces to the effigy until one of them added the crown.

Lady Macbeth began to speak words which, in Shakespeare's version, were attributed to the first witch, then took a poker and stabbed out the wax eyes of the effigy. The eyes melted and blood gushed out. After a ten second fade the lights were rapidly brought up for the next scene with Duncan, Banquo, Malcolm and Macduff. The play proceeded as a series of visual shocks (Schiele 2005: 17). Again there is a parallel to be drawn with Russian formalism in forcing the audience to see the original Shakespeare text with new eyes.

### *The Critic as Artist*

Marowitz's 1971 adaptation of *The Critic as Artist* involved the addition of a dramatic scenario in which Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas meet for the first time. The adaptation stripped away Wilde's original prose from the piece, leaving only dialogue. The rationale for this move was to compensate for the fact that Wilde's original was not intended as a piece of dramatic writing. The set was a Victorian sitting room. Green carnations were handed out to the audience as they entered the theatre. Curtains made of gauze surrounded the space and, when lit, became transparent, giving a dreamlike quality to the production. Timothy West played the part of Oscar Wilde. The production was critically successful and ran for five and a half weeks.

The second original piece by Marowitz to be presented at the Open Space was *Artaud at Rodez* in December 1975 (Schiele 2005: 214). Marowitz drew upon information he had gained through research into Artaud's life and his interview with Dr. Ferdiere in 1966. Dr. Ferdiere was Artaud's friend and the man responsible for Artaud's treatment at Rodez where Artaud was hospitalised. The piece shows a man obsessed with a personal vision of what art in the theatre ought to be and who is driven mad by his inability to realise his vision. The play was dramatised as a confrontation between Dr. Ferdiere and Artaud himself. Dr. Ferdiere was

portrayed as the personification of conformist values at odds with Artaud who was portrayed as the personification of the artistic temperament.

In 1970, during the Open Space's third year of operation, the theatre received £1500 (now worth roughly £40,000) from the Arts Council but was otherwise struggling financially. Marowitz and Thelma Holt decided to arrange film screenings of a new Andy Warhol film called *Flesh* about a male prostitute who is pressured by his wife to raise money for her lesbian girlfriend's abortion. Warhol was a popular sensation at the time. Marowitz and Holt believed that the film screenings would generate some much needed income for the theatre and also reflect Marowitz's interest in the American avant-garde and Greenwich Village experimentation. The film was screened three or four times daily for three weeks, starting in January 1970. On 3 February thirty-two police constables and a superintendent from Scotland Yard raided the Open Space during a scheduled screening and ordered the projectionist to stop the film. The film and projector were confiscated by the police as were the Open Space's documents, books and receipts (Miles 2010: 292).

The following day the raid was headline news and there was shortly thereafter a debate in the House of Commons about the film, involving then Labour Home Secretary and future Prime Minister James Callaghan. Ultimately, the Director of Public Prosecutions advised the Metropolitan Police that a criminal prosecution with respect to charges of obscenity was not warranted. Nevertheless a magistrate's hearing on the lesser charge that the theatre had allowed members of the general public into a licensed club was allowed to go forward. The Open Space was fined £220 which was then paid by Andy Warhol himself in a gesture of public support for the theatre (Marowitz 1990: 143-145).

In 1976 The Open Space moved to temporary premises in a disused post office on Euston Road because the block of Tottenham Court Road where the original Open Space was located

had been closed for redevelopment. The company responsible for the redevelopment promised to include plans for a new theatre for the Open Space to occupy on Tottenham Court Road upon completion. This promise helped to influence the Camden Council to approve the demolition, but there was no written agreement and the construction company subsequently failed to honour its spoken agreement (Schiele 2005: 7). This, along with a confluence of other factors, principally including the departure of Holt from the Open Space, ultimately led to the dissolution of Open Space and Marowitz's subsequent departure from the UK in 1980.

The split with Holt arose after Marowitz abruptly got married for the first time in 1976 to the model Julia Crosthwaite in a civil ceremony at St. Pancras Town Hall. He told Thelma Holt about it only one day in advance. According to Marowitz his new bride became involved with designing the snack bar at the new Open Space Euston Road premises but Holt was not properly consulted and this created tension and acrimony. Previously Marowitz had abruptly contacted Holt during her own honeymoon and she had returned early to work on behalf of the Open Space at his insistence. Also at this time Marowitz had materials intended for his and his wife's new flat diverted temporarily to the Euston Road premises which was also under construction. Although Marowitz did not misappropriate funds from the theatre he did use contacts the theatre employed to handle his own work and purchased his private materials at wholesale prices through those contacts.

One of the builders at the Euston Road premises was also an actor Marowitz had rejected at an audition at the theatre and who also happened to live with a reporter for the *Evening Standard* (Marowitz 1990: 216). An article appeared accusing Marowitz of impropriety and although the board subsequently found that there had been no misappropriation of the theatre's funds, a stigma remained. Thelma Holt resigned her post as executive director of the Open Space in June 1977. Although the theatre kept going for an additional two years

following her departure this marked the beginning of end of the Open Space as Holt had effectively kept 'the wheels turning' of the organisation.

Without Holt, Marowitz found that he had alienated himself from a large number of people within the theatre community. After the closure of the Open Space he was unable to generate fresh artistic collaborations in Britain. These factors, along with the collapse of his first marriage, led Marowitz to leave Britain for California where he lived from 1980 until his death on 2 May 2014. During the period at the Open Space Theatre (1968-1979) more than 175 plays were produced. Many writers and directors, such as Sam Shepard and Mike Leigh (Hewison 1986: 204), who started their careers at the Open Space were to go on to have significant influence on the course of theatre history in subsequent decades.

### *RSC*

Another underlying factor that may have led to Marowitz's decision to leave Britain was that he had come to be seen as difficult to work with by some influential theatre figures. In 1974, for example, Marowitz had been approached by Trevor Nunn to direct Philip Magdalany's *Section Nine* for of the RSC and accepted. *Section Nine* began at The Place in London and then transferred to the Aldwych Theatre in London's West End. The play was a farce about Watergate. It was well received but Marowitz clashed with the cast as well as the author. The conflict occurred because Marowitz felt that the play did not have an effective ending and so to provide one he introduced a series of cartoon slides showing different heads of state embracing one another as a means of putting a comic punctuation mark to the end of the performance. One of the cartoon slides was a drawing of Queen Elizabeth II embracing Idi Amin, which infuriated Magdalany. Magdalany brought the artistic director Trevor Nunn into the dispute and the slide was removed upon the productions' transfer to London's West End without Marowitz's knowledge. Marowitz became incensed and in so doing alienated himself

from Trevor Nunn. He became stigmatised as difficult to work with. *Section Nine* was the last play that Marowitz directed for the RSC although he was involved with an aborted production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks* in 1988 under Nunn's successor Terry Hands (Chambers 2004: 93). It seemed that his abrasive personality may have led to his burning of too many bridges although this abrasive tendency was intertwined with his view that artists are motivated by dissatisfaction with what proceeds them.

### *Conclusion*

As things turned out Marowitz's London period 1956–1980 was the prime period of his artistic and intellectual vitality. By analysing the events in his career during this period this study has sought to provide an overview but also contribute a new perspective on this important figure in contemporary theatre. By examining the reception of events as they took place and artistic developments as they evolved, this chapter has sought to clearly elucidate the main elements of Marowitz's work. This chapter has examined patterns within his career which are relevant to fostering a comprehensive understanding of the subject material.

These patterns were intertwined with his personal journey and movements. The main focus of this study is the period 1956–1980 which of course coincides with his period in Britain. As described in this chapter Marowitz experienced the advent of Off Broadway first hand as a youth in Greenwich Village and as a theatre critic for the *Village Voice* climbing fire escapes and attending unconventional performances in unconventional locales. His move to Britain during the watershed year of 1956 combined with his iconoclasm and his pattern of confronting established practices and institutions were perhaps in some way emblematic of the changes in the alternative theatre movement itself during this period.

In his interview (5 June 2011) Marowitz identified the end of a particular phase of experimental theatre work as the coming of the Thatcher government in 1979 and the



subsequent withdrawal in 1980 of subsidy from a number of theatres (Itzin 1980: 158). 1980 was also the year that Marowitz left Britain and returned to the United States on a permanent basis after the dissolution of the Open Space and a split with his partner Thelma Holt. There is virtually no existing commentary related to Marowitz after his London period. 1980-2014 was a period in his career which warrants further examination as many of his books, plays, and directorial projects including the Broadway production of *Sherlock's Last Case* (1987), *Recycling Shakespeare* (1991) and his work with the Czech National Theatre (2005) all took place after moving to Los Angeles. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, further study in this area would posit key questions about the impact of working within different theatrical environments and would seek to place the whole of his theatrical influence in perspective, in a way which has not been done before.

## Chapter Seven: Nancy Meckler

Nancy Meckler and her company Freehold were among the first to utilise the Drury Lane Arts Lab. Meckler arrived in London in April 1968 after working at the La MaMa Plexus in New York. Meckler and her company Freehold were pioneers in using the body rather than words as the primary means of expression (Chambers 1980:106). Freehold would help to introduce 'physical theatre' to the British theatrical landscape and introduce a new kind of dramaturgy based on the physicalisation of language.

For Meckler's style of theatre is based on the most vital concept evolved by the American avant-garde groups of the 1960s: the body as a supersensitive instrument of expression. Her style of theatre is making a direct attack on our most notable stage convention—namely, drama as literature. It is the body which has to bear the main burden of the theatrical expression involved: the text is often viewed as a disguised tool of repression. (Ansorge 1975:26)

Meckler originally came to London for a few months during 1960 as a part-time student at the Guildhall while still an undergraduate student at Antioch College. In 1967 she did an MA at N.Y.U. run by Richard Schechner during the same period when he was founding the Performance Garage which later became the Wooster Group. It was at this time that Meckler first became involved with experimental theatre. In the evenings she worked and performed with the La MaMa Plexus and saw the work of the Living Theatre and Open Theatre (Meckler 2012). Ellen Stewart was very supportive and she let the group perform at La MaMa. Meckler then endeavoured to return to London and was accepted to the one-year course at L.A.M.D.A..

After completing the course she remained in London intending to stay on a temporary basis but met her future husband, the producer and lawyer David Aukin, and began working with the Wherehouse La MaMa Group in London run by Beth Porter. Meckler ended up staying in

London and, when Wherehouse La MaMa was disbanded by Porter, Meckler continued to work with the nucleus of the group and renamed it Freehold. Both the Wherehouse La MaMa group and Freehold based their activities at the Drury Lane Arts Lab.

The obvious comment on this year's remarkable boom in experimental theatre is that we have contributed remarkably little to it ourselves. It now operates from about half a dozen centres in London and its development in provincial cities has rightly been called the "Arts Lab Explosion". And yet from the work I have seen, it seems less an indigenous growth than an extension of the American underground. One recent case is that of the new Warehouse Company who were playing in the Arts Laboratory earlier this month. Three of their members come from the New York La Mama troupe as you might almost have guessed from their programme (Wardle, *The Times*, 21 December 1968).

Meckler had a conventional theatre background and was an undergraduate student at Antioch College in Ohio, and did postgraduate training at L.A.M.D.A. with an acting course in the Classics and Shakespeare. L.A.M.D.A. had an 'American course' for overseas students. It was a one-year course called the D course. She was in London on the course for nine months but then stayed for an additional year because she had started undergoing therapy in England. Originally when Meckler was an undergraduate student at Antioch College she spent a year abroad in France at a university in Besançon, in the Franche Comté. In the east of France, this was not Paris and she found the environment exceedingly dull. She wrote to drama schools asking if they would take her for a term and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London said that she could visit and audition. She auditioned and the Guildhall said that they could not accept her as a full-time student but that she could study part-time. So Meckler initially lived in England for three months and was a part-time student at the Guildhall taking three classes in 1960 (Meckler, 2012). Two years after she graduated from Antioch College, Meckler applied to L.A.M.D.A.

When she returned to America after completion of the course, a friend from L.A.M.D.A. was in a small group in New York City started by Stanley Rosenberg, who had been with Eugenio Barba in Denmark. Rosenberg was starting a company called La MaMa Plexus and there were seven people involved. He introduced Meckler to Grotowski exercises, like 'the Cat' and other physical exercises. Most of the members of the company were working or going to school during the day, so they would meet at 3.30pm and stay until 7pm. Some of them were teachers, some were actors, and Meckler was then doing a new MA at N.Y.U. (Dramatic Theory and Criticism) with Richard Schechner. Schechner was starting the Performance Garage and he created *Dionysus 69* at that time. Meckler was exposed at this time to physical theatre, Grotowski, the Living Theatre and Open Theatre. When she did the physical exercises she found them interesting and felt more released as an actor than she had when studying theatre in a conventional way (Meckler, interview, 2012).

Meckler was in New York and wanted to work as an actress. She got a job as a production secretary for a year with the Broadway musical *Never on Sunday* (1967). Then she was in England briefly visiting friends when she met her husband David Aukin. They started dating in 1968 and Meckler thought she would stay for a few more weeks. However, she did not have any work in New York, and so she stayed and has never left. She says her choice was as casual as that. Aukin was a lawyer at the time and was busy during the day whereas Meckler was prohibited from working in Britain without a permit. Meckler searched to find out if there was any theatre she could get involved with. As discussed in previous chapters, there was a La MaMa company in London run by Beth Porter, who had been in La MaMa's *Futz* and *Tom Paine*. Meckler started meeting with the group and would work with them virtually every day. They would do physical exercises which Tom O'Horgan had taught them when he visited and worked with the company during the London production of *Hair* in 1968.

There was a falling out with Porter after she went to America to film *Futz* (1969). According to Meckler when Porter returned to London there was a dispute about using the name of the company, Warehouse La MaMa. While Porter was away other members of the group wanted to keep working. Meckler started working on a project with them called *Alternatives*. According to Meckler when Porter came back from New York she announced that she was disbanding the company immediately although they had a booking at the Mercury Theatre for *Alternatives*. There were seven members of Meckler's faction who wanted to carry on and so they then adopted the name, Freehold.

When Meckler started there were relatively few well-established women directors. Joan Littlewood was one and Wendy Toye directed commercial theatre. There was also Jane Howell at the Royal Court. Further there were some distinguished women directors in regional theatre, for example, Joan Knight who after several years of success at Farnham took over Perth Theatre in 1968, becoming renown in that role. Nonetheless, Meckler has a sense that it was unusual for a woman to be a director. This, she says, is why she did not pursue it at first. She did not think anyone would take her seriously even if she did want to be a director. By her own account Meckler fell into being primarily identified as a director because people knew she had directed in New York and so they would ask her to direct various projects (Meckler, 2012).

Jim Haynes also supported Meckler and Freehold. They had nowhere to rehearse so they went to Haynes and asked for his help. He said that they could rehearse in the Drury Lane Arts Lab which, as noted in Chapter Five, he had opened in August 1967, although at that time it was very busy. Both Ellen Stewart of La MaMa and Haynes shared a common characteristic of being historically important facilitators of theatre. Freehold would warm up in the foyer and occasionally David Hare and Howard Brenton who had founded the Portable Theatre, and were working at the Arts Lab, used to walk through the foyer and chat with

members of Meckler's company. One of Freehold's members was dating Max Stafford-Clark who was still involved with the Traverse at the time. Stafford-Clark invited Freehold to Edinburgh and so they took *Alternatives, Mr Jello* by George Birimisa and Maria Irene Fornes's *The Life of 3*. Maria Irene Fornes is associated with both the Open Theatre and the Judson Poets Theatre and also founded The New York Theatre Strategy (1971) which helped develop the work of such playwrights as Rochelle Owens, Rosalyn Drexler and David Henry Hwang. The production of her play was featured in *Vogue*.

Stephen Rea was in Freehold at the time and describes working with Meckler and Freehold as his real training, as opposed to his time at the Abbey (Rees 1992: 37-46). Freehold did physical training as well as political training. Rea was making a living because he was Irish and he would get acting jobs as an Irish actor. He came to Freehold and said that he did not want to play exclusively Irish roles. The members of Freehold all worked for no pay.

However, according to Meckler life in Britain was much cheaper at the time and you could live on ten pounds a week, and that included rent and food. Freehold were deeply influenced by *Towards a Poor Theatre* and did actor based Grotowski exercises. They were inspired by the idea of the poor theatre and the idea of the actor being placed at the centre of the work.

With Meckler's productions the dynamism always comes from the actors and so she has never heavily incorporated video for example, because she believes it swamps the actors.

Freehold's work focused on the actor and rehearsals would emphasise psychophysical exercises designed to free the actor for the maximum facilities of expression. Workshop rehearsals would last from 11am until 5:30pm with one break of less than an hour. The morning sessions involved calisthenics, gymnastics, acrobatics and psychophysical exercises. The 'Cat' exercise for example involved a sequence based on the movements of a cat waking up and stretching but then became more strenuous and involved head stands and somersaults. The exercise could be done in many different ways by focusing on different words while

doing it. Different words were expressed in different ways and accessed different feelings and intuitive responses.

In another exercise the actors would work in pairs while sitting on the floor. One actor would attempt a non-verbal vocal sound in order to express a simple idea. When the actor had finished the other would reply in the same manner. At a certain point Meckler would instruct the actors to get up on their feet and attempt to convey the idea to their partner by movement alone. The objective was to embody the meaning abstractly in both sound and movement. Finally the actors were told to combine the movement and the vocalisation (Shank 1972:16).

In another exercise Freehold employed, which was also used by the Open Theatre, the group divided into two lines each facing each other. One person began a movement and a non-verbal sound which they repeated again and again as they approached a second actor in the line facing them. The second actor would then absorb and embody the sound and movement of the first actor who would then take their place in the line. Then the second actor would slowly change and evolve the movement and sound organically into something else and then repeat the process by passing it along to another company member in the line.

During the afternoon rehearsal session, Freehold would reassemble and work on developing their next production. The non-verbal sounds and abstract movements were now used to express images, feelings and the prevailing environment of the work. This was the method used by Freehold even when the starting point was an established classical piece of literature (Shank 1972: 18). The objective was to eliminate the filter of the conscious mind between the stimulus and the impulse. During these workshop rehearsals Meckler would take notes on things that might be used in the production or which seemed to have the potential for further development. After a certain time Meckler would stop the exercise and there would be a general discussion about what had taken place. Then the same actors or perhaps different

members of the company would repeat the same process with the same lines but focus on Meckler's directions or images which in the first attempt and, through discussion, seemed to yield the most interesting possibilities. It was Meckler who guided the actors and selected elements for the production; however, all of the members of the group contributed significantly and creatively by way of their improvisational work. In anticipation of a new piece *Freehold* would rehearse for approximately four months in this manner, five days a week.

*Freehold*'s most successful work was an anti-war adaptation of *Antigone* (1969-70). It marked a shift away from purely conventional literary reinterpretation and involved physical gymnastics and an orientation based on the impetus provided by the Peace Movement in America. The company created non-naturalistic images through gesture and movement and changed the invocations to the gods into appeals for 'a commitment to Love' for example. The contortions and physical images created on stage drew an analogy with classical choric laments. It was intended to resonate with the audience as addressing their own group dilemma as once the Chorus had done for Theban nobles. The actors were not tied to one consistent character as would be the case in a conventional narrative (Craig 1980: 106). Rather, this practice was Post-Brechtian and in keeping with contemporaneous work by the Open Theatre and Living Theatre.

*Antigone* came about after *Freehold* had gone to the Traverse with *Mr. Jello* and *Alternatives*. They returned to London as the Drury Lane Arts Lab was in the process of closing down and so they found a room to rehearse in at the Oval House. They started creating *Antigone* because Meckler was fascinated by Greek tragedy. In New York La MaMa Plexus had often used scenes from *Oedipus Rex* for exercises. This type of work involved very lengthy improvisations in which everyone would act out their expressionistic subtext. There were rarely lengthy discussions but people would do inspired things, and other people would feed



words in. Although with *Antigone* they were assisted by the writer Peter Hulton, the members of Freehold all took turns typing up sections. The *Antigone* costumes were made out of Army surplus clothing, all dyed oxblood red (Meckler, Interview, 14 January 2012). This is how they created *Antigone*. Meckler would take it apart and get rid of sections, and then Hulton would write another section. Everybody contributed material, and then the company put it all together with the assistance of Hulton.

The Oval House and Peter Oliver who ran it allowed Freehold to rehearse there and he only charged them the equivalent of tube fare. They rehearsed *Antigone* there and the People Show and Pip Simmons were also working there. Then the groups also started performing there as well because it was free. It was not registered as a theatre at the time but as exclusively a youth centre.

With *Antigone* there was a dismantling of traditional hierarchies, in terms of director, actor, playwright and audience. The Living Theatre was a big influence and the members of Freehold saw the Living Theatre when they came to London in 1969. To a certain degree Freehold were imitating them and the Open Theatre: Meckler adored the Open Theatre, and although she did not know how they did what they did, on some level her company was imitating it and trying to understand it. One of the ways in which Freehold emulated the Open Theatre was by allowing process and technique to arise from the material. The Living Theatre performed shows at the Roundhouse, such as *Frankenstein* in 1965 and, much later, *Prometheus* in 1979. By the end of *Frankenstein* some audience members would take their clothes off and then go out onto the streets. According to Meckler, people were high on drugs and they were saying things like 'theatre belongs to the people, come out and onto the streets' (Meckler, 2012).

After the members of Freehold had been exposed to performances like that the conventional theatre seemed antiquated and very tame. Meckler and Freehold wanted to do this kind of work and to break down barriers. Freehold did not want sets and costumes or stars. Britain had had censorship until 1968 while Freehold's work was anti-establishment, responding to the hippie movement. It was anti-consumerism, anti-establishment and anti-strait-laced parents (Meckler, 2012).

The Freehold *Antigone* was a deconstructed version of Sophocles' play. Meckler reworked the language so it would be more accessible and relevant to contemporary actors and audiences. Freehold rehearsed *Antigone* for three months and then performed it at the Drury Lane Arts Lab. Jim Haynes was very keen on *Antigone* and gave them space. The group then managed to get a booking at the Edinburgh Festival, in the same tent as the People Show. It was a circus tent by day. In the evenings the groups alternated the six and the nine o'clock slot. Haynes was there with the organiser of an Arts Festival in Berlin who then invited Freehold to transfer their adaptation of *Antigone* to Berlin to open the Festival. And so, suddenly, Freehold were on a train to Berlin, opening the Arts Festival in a 600-seat theatre. When in Edinburgh Freehold also met Richard Demarco, who then invited Freehold to appear in his gallery with their production of *Antigone*. The production did not have a set and so they could perform it anywhere with very little set up required.

The Vietnam War was in the popular consciousness and Freehold's *Antigone* had key anti-Vietnam War overtones, because it is about a young man who lies unburied. Freehold, which received the John Whiting award for New Writing for *Antigone* in 1971, devised their text based on the original, altering, for example, one chorus to a chant: 'in the name of love for a country, a man has gone to war. In the name of love for a country, a brother is not buried' (Meckler, 2012). The idea conveyed was of people going to war because they do it in the name of love and yet that impulse being opposed by an imposed neglect of family duty.

Freehold's work was expressionistic but not necessarily provocative in its approach to its audience. Freehold company members put their names in programmes but did not want anyone to know what parts they played and at the end of the play Freehold had a sequence where, as the body of the young man was not buried, the actresses took turns being the body at the front of the stage. Then, when Antigone came on, she buried 'him' by throwing bits of newspaper over him. At the end of the performance they had a box of the newspaper, and the audience were invited to take handfuls and bury the body by throwing newspaper on it. This was an efficacious performance practice intended to change the audience members' attitude and relationship to the war in Vietnam. Interestingly in England, according to Meckler, very few people in the audience would get up and participate, but in Germany the entire audience got up to do it and took it very seriously perhaps to do with more openness towards post-Brechtian ideas in Germany regarding experimental theatre.

Meckler had come to Britain in the year of the big Vietnam exodus in 1968. She did not come because of Vietnam, but it was the year when a lot of people left America because of Vietnam and because they did not want to fight in the war. A lot of Freehold's work was to do with the hippie movement and a generation's rebelling against their parents. 'Anything that came from your parents' generation, anything your parents would go to, you wouldn't go to. Anything your parents would wear, you would not wear. Anything they would value, success or careerism or having your name on a programme, nothing mattered except peace and love, and community' (Meckler, 2012).

*Antigone* was so successful and so lauded that in some ways it hampered the company because it could never quite achieve that level of impact again. With *Antigone* people started flocking to performances and fought to get in. There were never enough performances. The company was measured in terms of this later and this resulted in an expectation within the company of consistently trying to outdo their previous achievements. Because of the success

of *Antigone*, Freehold was invited to tour widely with subsequent projects. *Antigone* went to the Venice Biennale, and a festival in Munich and was often revived. The British Council sent them abroad. In the 1971 Zurich Festival Freehold performed *Mary Mary*. The companies that were in this festival included Teatre Libera, Living Theatre, La MaMa in New York, Cirque de Soleil, the Playhouse of the Ridiculous, Theatre National Strasbourg, Chelsea Theatre Centre, Bread and Puppet, and the Open Theatre. At that point Freehold was seen as being on the same level as these other historic alternative theatre companies.

Freehold was the first visiting company to appear at the Young Vic with *The Duchess of Malfi* (1970). Once again the clothes were all made out of army surplus and bandages. Freehold were attempting to be experimental and to break the mould and to go somewhere others had not gone. The goal was to deconstruct without a writer to help them. With *Antigone*, the writer Peter Hulton had assisted Freehold. However, with *The Duchess of Malfi* Freehold members were developing the working script themselves from a classic text. As such, they found themselves wallowing in the material and did not know quite how to shape it and effectively deconstruct the original material.

Meckler saw the Open Theatre present *The Serpent*, and she was fascinated by what they had done and how they had done it. Freehold attempted to imitate the Open Theatre in order to try and figure out how they did it. They did not know how else to find out because there was not very much written at the time about how the Open Theatre created and experimented. Freehold also attempted using exercises over and over again, hoping that something was going to be revealed to them and that it would open a door. This theatre practice helped evolve a new dramaturgy involving the deliberate breaking down of hierarchies. Many artistic movements react to what came before and that was true of the contemporaneous physical theatre movement of which Freehold was a part. The idea to physicalise language

came out of a mistrust of traditional literary forms. This influence came from America through practitioners like Meckler, and groups in Britain then started imitating it.

In 1971-1972 Freehold presented *Genesis*, created in collaboration with the writer Roy Kift at London's Cockpit Theatre. The piece was clearly influenced by the work of Joseph Chaikin and the Open Theatre and in particular *The Serpent* which Meckler had seen in 1969. The actors transformed into animals and snakes and recreated biblical stories in order to show that man is the creator of his own myths and primitive notions of divine intervention and provenance stem from an impulse to supplant our feelings of guilt over societal transgressions and crimes. The piece began with a gymnastic display in which Adam and Eve evolve according to the modern understanding of biology rather than according to the traditional biblical narrative. Freehold's *Genesis* explored the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. In the Freehold adaptation it was Abel and not Cain who asks the question 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Brother murders brother out of frustration rather than jealousy.

Also in 1971-1972, *Mary Mary* was written for Freehold by Roy Kift and traced the history of the notorious 1968 case of Mary Bell from Newcastle who at the age of eleven was responsible for the murder by strangulation of a three-year old and a four-year old boy. The members of Freehold investigated her family background and aspects of her socialisation, growing up in poverty and the ignorance and amorality with which she was confronted from an early age. Bell's mother was a prostitute and Bell claims to have been abused by her mother as well as her mother's clients. As was the case with Freehold's work more generally, with *Mary Mary* the group was concerned with creating the physical reality and the aspects of perversion, oppression and frustration which ran through Mary's experience of life. *Mary Mary* made a contrast with the company's other pieces which were on some level drawn from myth, ritual and pre-existing classical texts. The story of Mary Bell subverts the mythic view

of the young girl as nurturer. It is also worth noting that through trial and error Freehold made the decision to create these works in collaboration with a writer.

Freehold's exploration of the world of myth and legend was also evident in their final production, the 1973 adaptation of *Beowulf* adapted in collaboration with Liane Aukin and performed at the Traverse. This production was after Meckler had a baby and by her own account it was not a very successful production. There is a certain amount of risk in any theatrical endeavour, but in devising these kinds of works in particular it can potentially be a spectacular failure. In some ways, too, by this production, Freehold had become a victim of its own success. With public subsidy there also comes a certain compromise, Meckler argues.

As with the Traverse and many other examples, with public subsidy there develops the need for the conventional kind of administrative structure that, in turn, conventionalises the organisational bases on which the art is made. Then something is lost: a kind of anarchic ethos is gone. Once it is announced that a group will receive a sizable grant then it has to pay Equity wages. But once it has to pay those, Meckler argues, then it will not be able to produce the same sort of shows because the money will not reach far enough.

Paradoxically, when such companies were not paying anyone they could get twenty or thirty people or even more to participate (Meckler, 2012). Such a group could do all sorts of things like going into overtime without paying for it. To get public funding groups were obliged to be transparent and have certain administrative structures. In many ways this is a good thing but the point is that there is a certain trade-off that comes with public subsidy and the required restructuring of the organisation. There is at least a danger that the original creativity will be diminished or even lost.

There is a further potential problem because, when the Arts Council gives groups money, it also specifies, or at least this is Meckler's perception, that it must also tour for as many weeks

as it rehearses. So, when Freehold rehearsed *Beowulf* for three months it was not a success but nonetheless Freehold was obliged to tour it for three months and in Meckler's view had no choice. After a while it became a treadmill and Freehold was obliged to tour shows that in their own view were not worth touring. Conversely, when Freehold started, people first became excited about the material and then a tour emerged out of a sense of building momentum and fully realising the project for its own sake. The work eventually became too much of a treadmill which is why, Meckler says, she finally bowed out and could not keep Freehold going after 1973.

It was an important feature of Freehold's work that they chose to focus on pieces revolving around dominant female protagonists such as *Antigone* (1969), *The Duchess of Malfi* (1970) and *Mary Mary* (1972). In fact this has been an important aspect of Meckler's entire career as a director in Britain since 1968. Meckler's other major contribution to the British alternative theatre during this period was in leading a group based in Britain which was doing work employing the very same techniques and practices as the Open Theatre, Living Theatre and La MaMa. Her work then influenced the practices of future groups working within the British alternative theatre. Freehold also helped to nurture the early careers of such figures as Stephen Rea.

After Freehold Meckler also became very involved with Sam Shepard thereby providing another link with artists who began in Off Off Broadway. Originally Meckler got to know Sam Shepard because she knew his wife. She directed one of his plays and Shepard responded to her work. Subsequently Shepard and Meckler have collaborated on a number of his plays in both New York and London including the premieres of *Action* and *Killer's Head* in 1975, *Buried Child* in 1996 and the premiere of *A Particle of Dread* in 2014. Meckler was also the first woman to direct at the National Theatre's South Bank buildings when she directed Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1981 (Hall 1993: 316) as well as

directing new plays at the Royal Court, Bush Theatre and the Almeida. It is necessary to point out that while her work was important to the alternative theatre movement in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s the bulk of her career has taken place since 1980. She has also directed regularly for the RSC and from 1988 was Director of the company Shared Experience until it was disbanded in 2013. Shared Experience was founded by Mike Alfreds, an American director, in 1975.

Meckler's husband David Aukin was originally trained as a lawyer at Oxford but later came to be known as the 'King of the Fringe' when he was instrumental in founding The People Show, Joint Stock, Foco Novo and Freehold, all four of which were run for a time from his and Meckler's basement in St. John's Wood. Aukin wanted to be a producer and at first what he did was to run Fringe companies. He administered Freehold and managed The People Show. He co-founded Joint Stock and also administered Foco Novo. In 1973 the members of Freehold staged a production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in Nancy Meckler and David Aukin's house and members of the audience would move from room to room. It was this production which inspired the beginning of Joint Stock (Susan Croft, UH, 8/4/2014: n.p.). Joint Stock was formed in 1974 by Max Stafford-Clark, David Hare, David Aukin, and, later, Bill Gaskill.

Aukin was also the director of the board of the Oval House and many of the alternative theatre groups migrated there after the Drury Lane Arts Lab folded in 1969. He later became, in turn, Director of the Hampstead Theatre Club, Leicester Haymarket Theatre and Executive Director of the Royal National Theatre. He brought together a lot of the alternative theatre groups for a season at the Cockpit Theatre in 1971-1972 which included Pam Gems' first play. He was also responsible for bringing Joseph Chaikin and the Open Theatre from New York to play at the Roundhouse in north London in 1971.



Aukin produced the original production of *The Elephant Man* (1977) by the American playwright and co-founder of Foco Novo, Bernard Pomerance. It is arguably the most successful play to ever emerge out of the London fringe. Pomerance originally gave the play to Freehold but they did not know how to stage it without makeup. Eventually Pomerance gave the play to Foco Novo and they realised they could stage it using projections of original photographs of Joseph Merrick. They toured the production, directed by Michael Rudman, and played at the Hampstead in north London. Then it was performed in the United States at the Booth Theatre on Broadway and then again at the National Theatre in London. *The Elephant Man* was the longest running straight play in Broadway history and there is a new revival currently playing on Broadway.

### *Conclusion*

The influence of Meckler on the alternative theatre movement in Britain 1956-1980 was in the main two-fold. One aspect of her impact was that she and her company Freehold were important in introducing 'Physical Theatre', in a post-Brechtian sense, to the landscape of theatre and performance in Britain. Her other major contribution was in elevating the status of women as both directors and also as the primary focus of theatre and performance pieces. Although women represent half of the world's population historically within the theatre women have been marginalised. Although women were written about in ancient Greece they themselves did not write or act in plays and in England women did not appear on stage until 1661. It can be argued that literary 'Aristotelean' language itself has played a role in maintaining such a hierarchy. However Meckler's early career in Britain can be seen within the context of a generational shift which coalesced in Britain and America to a certain degree around the issue of Civil Rights, Women's Rights as well as a reaction to American involvement in Vietnam. While her experimental role appears to have been fulfilled by 1973, her subsequent career has been highly influential and demonstrates how many 'Fringe' artists

have become, over time, highly significant in the development and achievements of more traditional British theatre institutions.

### Chapter Eight: Ed Berman

Ed Berman and his umbrella company Inter-Action Productions (legal entity Inter-Action Trust Ltd) were extremely influential in pioneering unconventional modes of community performance in unconventional locations for non-traditional theatre going audiences. Berman began as a playwright and in 1968 started the first permanent lunchtime theatre in the Britain. Over the next decade his umbrella company and its components would be responsible for an extremely prolific range of community arts and professional theatre activities in dozens of venues. This included the activities of the British American Repertory Company. The British American Repertory Company was the first joint company approved by both equity unions in both countries and was designed for non-star actors and stage staff. Berman set up the British-American theatre company to create an exchange of actors and stage managers. The company was hosted by both the UK and US embassies on both sides of the Atlantic and so can be seen as reinforcing the ‘special relationship’ mentioned in previous chapters. They produced Tom Stoppard’s *Dirty Linen* (1976) and *New-found-land* (1976), and Dogg’s *Hamlet Cahoot’s Macbeth* (1979). *New-Found-Land* (1976) is a comedy celebrating Ed Berman’s successful application for British citizenship. There were restrictions in the deal, including a stipulation that British American Repertory Company could only perform in four theatres over two weeks in either country. This unfortunately meant that at the time the plays produced could only be seen by a small number of people.

Tom Stoppard developed several plays for Berman’s theatres including *After Magritte* (1970), *Dogg’s Hamlet Cahoot’s Macbeth* and the highly successful *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land*. Stoppard learned about the work of Berman’s Dogg’s Troupe. Berman told him that he, Berman, was Prof. RL Dogg who wrote for children; in libraries therefore he would be found under “Dogg RL” (i.e. doggerel). This amused Stoppard and he wrote a piece for the company called *Dogg’s Our Pet* (1971) and that began a ten year relationship between

Berman and Stoppard. Stoppard developed scripts, culminating in *Dogg's Hamlet Cahoot's*, *Macbeth* and *Dirty Linen*.

Structure was critical to the activities of Inter-Action. Inter-Action had the express aim of combining community work with professional theatre activities as a tool to change society for the better. The company had a charitable framework and its workers had a communal living arrangement which originally grew out of environmental concerns. Berman regarded the entire enterprise as profoundly political in terms of changing society but not in a party-political sense. Regarding the social and political function of his company's work Berman stated at the time:

It's clear to me that if you accept the structure as 'political' as well as the intellectual and the verbal, then we are as 'political' as they come. 'Political' is not a code word for 'Marxist'. (Itzin 1980: 52)

In 1968 Ed Berman set up the charity Inter-Action. It became the umbrella for all his activities which included at least seven theatre companies, innovative community projects as well as initiatives making print and radio media accessible to local communities. Inter-Action also established the first City Farm and the first community architecture service in Europe. Berman has had a substantial and largely under-acknowledged impact on the British theatre landscape

### *Education and Early Initiatives.*

Ed Berman was born in Maine and went to Harvard at the age of sixteen. His mother did not work and his father was an entrepreneur and salesman and owned an American-style drug store. Berman was offered a scholarship to Harvard when he was fifteen but was dismissed in his first year for checking out library books in the name of cartoon characters. McGeorge Bundy, the Dean of Harvard College, said that he was depriving his class mates of their

books by returning them late. He studied Government and History, then Biblical Archaeology at the Divinity School. In 1962 he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford but was thrown out of Exeter College as well. He was drunk a fair bit of the time and was also arrested during his first year in Oxford for fighting with another Rhodes Scholar during a trip to London (Berman, 2010).

At Harvard Berman became friendly with two Indian students. Berman edited one of their theses which later became a book on Gandhi's period in South Africa. The thesis opened his mind to apartheid and to Gandhi and remained an important influence on Berman's life and art--which in part is why he now goes to India for a few months each year to do charitable work there. During his youth Berman also spent time on a private Civil Rights tour of the US. He was interested in Civil Rights and hitchhiked through the South and Western United States. He was repeatedly thrown in jail for vagrancy (Berman, 2010). He found some of what he saw in the South and South West frightening and disgusting. Berman became deeply interested in civil rights issues and the suffering it imposes on disadvantaged populations. He became a volunteer for Philips-Brooks House (a student voluntary society) when he was at Harvard and went to South Boston to work with inner city Black youth. The experience became an important influence. He quickly came to appreciate how far removed his Maine upbringing and background was from theirs. He tried to find ways to deal with Black youth and their differences. He began to develop and use children's games in an adult format to engage with them.

This initiative was the beginning of what later became known as the 'Inter-Action Creative Game Method'. For example, Berman took the game 'Simon Says' and adapted it by tapping a rhythm. If this was followed by Berman raising a finger, the children were to copy him, If he tapped and did not raise a finger and they copied him anyway, they were out. Berman was later to use this strategy as a training method for work with actors, young people, and

psychologists. Berman used the Inter-Action Creative Game Method to train a range of different groups, including those with disabilities. He would do three or four sessions a week and train others to do the same. His game was intended to help persons discover their individual creativity and their creativity within a group.

Berman read Government at Harvard and also learnt Turkish. At Oxford he studied the history of the Islamic peoples, but realised his interest was also in education. He shifted to psychology and education. Inter-Action Creative Game Method was quite developed by then and Berman wanted to study the roots of creativity. He started a D.Phil. at Oxford working on how new textbooks in countries such as Turkey, emerging anew, fostered completely new and radically different self-images of 'citizens'. Ataturk had discarded the old Ottoman Empire books of learning which were in Arabic and Persian and replaced them with new text books using the Latin alphabet.

Berman went to Turkey to pursue his research and lived on the Asian side of Istanbul, overlooking the Bosphorus. One day while reading on his balcony he was attacked by two neighbours on leave from the Turkish navy. They thought Berman was a spy and beat him severely. He was told that he had a clot on the brain and was given one year to live. Back in the United States authorities informed him that he could not return to Turkey because he had been accused of defaming Ataturk and the Turkish nation. Berman asserts that he still carries back injuries as a result of this incident to this day. It was also this incident which led Berman to start writing creatively (Berman, 2010). Berman had lost the stereoscopic vision in his eyes after the attack, and could only read in short bursts. He thought he had not long to live so he began writing play on issues important to him. At first he scrawled them out and someone else typed them up because he could not see clearly. *Freeze* (1966) was about cryogenics, a family trying to freeze their grandfather. *Stamp* (1966) was about Vietnam and later the advertisement for the show was a facsimile of a dollar bill, asking 'Is this worth the price of

murder and slaughter in Vietnam?’ Berman returned to England in 1966 but left Oxford and his D Phil behind.

### *England and New Associations*

Berman had left Oxford, and his girlfriend at the time suggested that he send his plays to Jean Pierre Voos at the Mercury Theatre, Notting Hill. The Mercury Theatre was the home of the Ballet Rambert Dance School and Voos’s International Theatre Club was also based there at the time. Voos put Berman’s plays on at the Mercury and made Berman a writer-in-residence. *Stamp* was also performed at the Little Theatre off St Martin’s Lane in London. At this time Berman first met Chris Cooper when Cooper was an Arts Council officer. They later had a longstanding working collaboration, Cooper eventually becoming the manager of Interaction’s ship, HMS President 1917, when he was made redundant from his role as Director of South East Arts.

During 1966 Berman was also involved with some ‘legal’ smuggling of Hellenic art from Turkey which took him to Sweden (because his co-smuggler had a Swedish girlfriend) where he met the La MaMa troupe. When Berman and La MaMa later met up again in London La MaMa agreed to perform one of Berman’s plays, *Super Santa*, which was performed at the launch of the Kensington and Chelsea Arts Council Committee. At the same time he presented the La MaMa production of *Tom Paine* also at the Mercury Theatre in 1967. Berman remained friendly with La MaMa.

In London from 1966 onward Berman continued to develop the theory and practice of interactive games. Berman did this with groups of young people, actors and community groups in London. In 1966 he was living on the floor of a flat rented by Voos and his wife Diane in Queensway. There he met Clive Barker from Birmingham University who had worked with Joan Littlewood and was also working with theatre games. Their work became

mutually influential even though Berman was focused on the psychology and creativity of individuals and groups generally while Barker's interest was in theatre games more specifically. Working in a community centre called Beauchamp Lodge, which had a canal boat on the Regent's Park canal, Berman offered to use his Game Method with children. Together Berman and Barker did a piece about Beowulf and the Dragon on the canal boat. Clive Barker served on the board of Inter-Action from its founding in 1968.

Berman met a lady named Pamela Rose connected to those running the Rambert Company. Her husband, Jim Rose, was writing a book on race relations in the United Kingdom. He wanted to meet people working with people from diverse backgrounds and mixed groups. She was introduced to Berman. Jim Rose had worked on the Enigma project at Bletchley Park during the war and maintained many influential contacts from there, including Richard Marsh who later became the head of British Rail. Berman wanted to set up a charity for Inter-Action and wanted Jim Rose to be the Chair but first Rose had to finish his book. Berman was doing volunteer work at the time, sleeping on floors and receiving meals from various people.

Berman also became friendly with Junior Telfer in 1966-67, a West Indian who ran the Ambiance Restaurant at No1 Queensway. Telfer's business was not doing well. Together Berman and Telfer decided to open up the downstairs for lunchtime theatre. Berman had nurtured the idea of doing theatre at different times of day for people with different work schedules. Inter-Action's Ambiance lunch-hour theatre club was started in June of 1968 downstairs at Telfer's Ambiance Restaurant (Itzin 1976: 5), and Telfer became a Trustee of Inter-Action. They presented theatre at lunch and also did an event at 6 a.m. at Billingsgate Fish Market, with the Dogg's Troupe. The Ambiance lunch-hour theatre club was central to the lunchtime theatre movement that became a burgeoning focus for new writing development in London from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. This venture was ultimately



responsible for a hugely innovative programme of short plays by authors including John Arden, Heathcote Williams, James Saunders, Howard Brenton, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. It also introduced to the British theatrical landscape numerous writers from the new experimental theatre that had emerged Off Off Broadway during the 1960s. The Ambiance lunch time theatre did the play *The Electronic Nigger* by Ed Bullins in their first season and it caused outrage. Bullins was the cultural minister for the Black Panther movement. Berman's own first five plays were produced in 1966, 1967 and 1968 by the International Theatre club at the Mercury Theatre in Notting Hill. The group which formed around these plays decided to leave in order to establish new companies within the newly formed Inter-Action (Berman, 2010).

#### *Inter-Action and its Components*

Inter-Action became constituted in April 1968 as a Trust, then a company, both registered as charities. Jim Rose became Chairman and Coutts became their bank. The board included: Clive Barker, Jim Rose, Junior Telfer and also David Henderson-Stewart, Berman's classmate from Oxford who was working for McKinsey & Co, and who brought in a number of people including the current Chairman (2014), Henry Strage, then a partner at McKinsey. Inter-Action brought together ideas and actions. Patrons became involved on the basis that they would assume a title, but with no commitment to attend meetings or to give donations. Stephen Pilkington invited Inter-Action to use his home at Rutherford Hall for a summer residency in Sussex for a time during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the first summer, John Fox, later of Welfare State, was based there.

Inter-Action also began a publishing company and community print shop. The publishing arm of Inter-Action was called In-Print and published books and booklets. One was authored by Andrew Phillips, later Lord Phillips of the Charity Commission, called *Charity Status and*

*the Law* and another was by Erin Pizzey on *Women's Refuges*. Additional titles included *Converting a Bus* about the Fun Art Bus; *Print, How You Can Do It Yourself*, teaching people how they could print for themselves; and *Tools for Change* and *Video and Community Work*. They published a series of handbooks which at first were distributed by a co-operative distributor, but when that failed they sold off some of the titles to the BBC and to other community publishers. They produced song books and tapes for the BBC entitled *Healthy Learning Songs*. They developed a vocabulary for teaching things like health to children with the idea that this way children would learn information for life. For each topic, say teeth-cleaning, they would have four different ways to learn: a song, a game, activity and a game song. The books included play-scripts, e.g. *Ten of the Best British Short Plays* and Tom Stoppard's *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land*. Other books were intended for groups which at that time had no publications, such as *Battered Women and the Law*. These small publications for unrepresented communities identified issues which became mainstream concerns.

In 1968 Inter-Action started working on a large derelict site in Kentish Town, London that had not yet been properly cleared. It was full of rubble and rats. They cleared the site and started a summer programme for children. The company took to building huge structures, like a Moby Dick. They told the children the story and built structures and then the children played around it. Berman believed that if you have an idea and it makes sense, you can find the funding. He set up and received funding for his City Farms, both by getting land from British Rail and money from the government's Urban Aid programme. It was the first time the Arts Council of Great Britain gave a Community Arts grant. Princess Anne visited. Later Berman put in a planning permission request to convert Buckingham Palace into a youth centre.

*Father Christmas Union*

The Father Xmas Union was a component of Inter-Action and was set up in 1969 at the Oval cricket ground to stage large-scale social activist events such as a protest against the use of non-union labour by Selfridge's. The first Father Xmas Union event took place at Whiteley's Department Store in Queensway, London. Inter-Action was hired in the early 1970s to deliver the annual Christmas grotto. Father and Mother Christmases with Eskimos and penguins entered the store and began asking the customers what they wanted for Christmas from the store. The public began leaving the store with those goods. This made them realise that they had to consider very carefully what they chose to do as 'events' (Berman, 2011).

The Father and Mother Xmas Union next picketed Selfridges on Oxford Street and was arrested for blocking the pedestrian walk way. They had someone at hand to photograph the event. In the end they were fined £12 each. Their case was supported by Joan Littlewood and Vanessa Redgrave. The following year the company announced that the Father and Mother Xmas Union were going to attack Barkers department store where members of the British Army were demonstrating firearms to children in the Father Christmas grotto. Berman sent out a press release saying they were going to attack the British Army. The following day the British Army withdrew from Barkers.

Inter-Action's street theatre had core themes such as when they picketed outside Selfridges. The company was involved in direct action and were in and out of the courts as a consequence. A National Front man was standing for a seat on the Camden Council. Berman got a piano, removed all of the black keys, and delivered it to the man's front door with a corresponding note, and accompanying press release. The man did not win the seat, although this result was probably hardly a direct result only of Berman's actions. The Father Christmas Union was open to all and it also staged anti-nuclear performances. It was a clear example of the ways in which Berman's influence, derived from his experience in America led him to

challenge and seek to affect cultural, political and social attitudes through experimental theatrical methods and activities.

*Ed Berman, the "Black and White Power Plays" Season, Roland Rees and Foco Novo*

In a more apparently traditional theatrical context, Berman programmed the first innovative season of plays exclusively on Black issues in Britain. The 'Black and White Power Plays' season was staged at the Ambiance in 1970. Non-theatre based and theatre based activities complemented one another in Berman's community focused experimental alternative approach. Berman and his Dogg's Troupe were involved with a Black Power event at the Roundhouse. Then Berman set in motion his Black Power Season of plays at the Almost Free. The 1970 season introduced the work of African American playwrights Ed Bullins as well as LeRoi Jones alongside work from white playwrights on Black issues by David Mercer and Israel Horowitz. As mentioned earlier, Ed Bullins, 'culture minister' of the Black Panther movement in the US, came to London and his play *It Bees Dat Way* was performed as a part of the Black and White Power Season. Roland Rees directed some of the plays in the season and went on to introduce the work of more new Black British playwrights with his own company Foco Novo.

Roland Rees had been in New York from 1965 through 1967 when theatre was being performed in all sorts of unconventional venues and he saw many practices that he had never seen before (Rees 1992: 16). In Greenwich Village he saw a lot of work at La MaMa as well as the work of his greatest hero, Joseph Chaikin, at the Open Theatre. Rees was interested in the form of Chaikin's work and the way actors played a number of different parts almost at the same time even as a number of different plots were going on simultaneously. Chaikin started his process by devising physical work with the actors in ways which Rees had not encountered before. Rees also saw Ellen Stewart produce unusual plays at La MaMa and he

subsequently premiered plays by Rochelle Owen (who was with La MaMa at the time) when he returned to London.

In 1965, America, and New York in particular, was the place where major cultural and artistic upheavals were happening. Experiments in film, theatre, the visual arts, contemporary music and the fusion of these forms, the proliferation of new centres for their performance, the mushrooming underground presses, the organisations surrounding the Vietnam War demonstrations, the rent strikes, Black consciousness groups, the Feminist movement, and experiments in collective and personal lifestyles, all made a lasting impact during my two years in that city. The energy of New York taught me that you can step out of tradition, start your own and 'Go for it!' I did not need much nudging to give up my academic future and start work in theatre (Rees 1992: 16).

When Rees returned to the UK he became associated with Ed Berman's Almost Free Theatre. As mentioned above, Berman and Rees also did Ed Bullins' play *The Electronic Nigger* in 1968 which Rees had brought back from Harlem. The play had been performed in Harlem by the Black Arts Rep and the Negro Ensemble Company and Rees met with Bullins and asked him for copies of his plays which had not been published at the time. In 1970 they collaborated again on the historic 'Black Power' season which concentrated on Black themes and the work of Black theatre makers. One of the shows they did during the season was *Black Pieces* by Mustapha Matura. *Black Pieces* was composed of six short plays and Rees used Chaikin's method of melding the pieces together. One immediate consequence of the 1970 season was that Matura was commissioned and then became a leading writer.

At the end of the 1970 season a meeting was held to discuss the allocation of funds into promised Black projects. £300 had been gathered from a separate collection at the theatre. Present at the meeting were: Michael X, eventually the last man executed in the Commonwealth in Jamaica, John Arden, Ed Bullins and Berman. Michael X said he was

going to take the money and put it into a 'Black Bank'. None of the others would back Berman in his objection to this, leaving open the possibility of misuse. After the Black Power Season Berman set up a caucus so that other seasons could be established. Most notable were the Women's Season and the Gay Season because they would help to establish a pattern of identity-based performance characteristic of later alternative theatre in Britain during the 1970s.

It is clear that much of the efficacy under discussion arose out of interactions within networks of experience and influence. For example, as we have seen, Roland Rees, Bernard Pomerance and David Aukin founded the Foco Novo Company in 1971 when they produced Pomerance's play of the same name. Pomerance who later wrote *The Elephant Man*, one of the most successful plays to emerge from the London Fringe, came to the UK from the United States in 1968. The first professional production of his work took place at one of Inter-Action's theatre sites and it was at Inter-Action that Pomerance met both Roland Rees and the producer David Aukin. By a strange coincidence Pomerance had gone to High School with David Aukin's wife, Nancy Meckler.

Foco Novo sought to find a new model of performance and to open theatre to new audiences in collaboration with the Labour movement, colleges and theatres. The company also worked with trade unions and in particular the National Union of Mineworkers. Foco Novo performed different shows in different types of venues, including the Almost Free theatre in 1974 with the first British production of a Fassbinder play (*Cock Artist*), but preferred venues suitable to the particular project. It also toured with Brecht's *Man is Man* in 1975. Foco Novo preferred to play in unusual places but funding came with touring and somewhat prescribed choice of work. Foco Novo's working process resembled Joseph Chaikin's, another example of an American nuanced network of influence, in that it favoured multiple narratives and an equal distribution of male and female parts on stage. Those choices defined the use of actors

and also defined the use of characters on stage as differentiated from the use of both in a conventional play. Hardly any one character was dominant.

### *Separation*

Berman was the Artistic Director of the Ambiance and Dogg's Troupe at the same time. Voos became paranoid, according to Berman, about Berman wanting to take over his theatre club at the Mercury. A man called Naftali Yavin had written to the theatre club while he was in Manchester doing postgraduate studies in theatre. Berman went to meet Yavin, and after seeing his work suggested to Voos that they invite Yavin to work with them at the Ambiance. Meantime, Berman had a falling out with Voos regarding their disagreement about control and felt it was necessary to leave. He took with him people from the company to do the new work he wanted to explore and develop.

Berman and Yavin began The Other Company (TOC) together in 1968. All of this happened within a few months (Berman, 2010). Yavin was interested in the Inter-Action Creative Game Method. Yavin later directed Berman's plays *Sagittarius* and *Virgo*. (*Virgo* had a woman in a cage and dealt with issues of female beauty being inside or outside. The cage rocked back and forth over the audience. Berman's interest was in the relationship between action and the audience.).

Berman developed his idea of 'environmental' theatre dealing with location and time while Yavin worked in powerful dramas by Peter Handke and James Saunders and devised work with the The Other Company. Berman created a formula for what he referred to as 'participatory theatre.' He would grade the shows on a scale of 0 (where the audience is seated watching action) to 10 (where the audience improvised the whole piece). He developed plays were developed along these lines and with reference to these criteria. In *Sagittarius* the actors sat on blocks surrounded by the audience. The play was about a

dysfunctional family. Drawing upon and applying psychological games theory in a theatre context created efficacious environmental physical pieces. Yavin died tragically in 1972 of a drug and alcohol overdose on the same day that the Fun Art Bus was launched.

### *The Ambience in Exile*

Later Telfer went out of business and the Ambience, then called the Ambience in Exile, moved to the Green Banana restaurant in Soho and then to the Institute of Contemporary Arts. At the Ambience in Exile at the Green Banana, the theatre space was downstairs, down a circular staircase. If a box set was required it had to be brought in early in the morning and removed after the lunchtime show to make way for the evening's entertainment. The Green Banana space seated thirty to fifty depending on the configuration. Berman solicited new scripts and wrote his own. Berman met director Geoffrey Reeves through Barker and brought him Stoppard's *After Magritte* which they did at the Ambience with a box set, with a daily get-in and get-out at the venue. Stoppard came to see his play. Barker acted in it and so did Prunella Scales who later became an Inter-Action Patron. Berman would ask anyone to do anything, under three rules: if you produce something you need to have either a well-known playwright, actor or director and you will probably manage to fill at least thirty to forty seats per show.

Berman found a workshop space for the Ambience in Exile for free, for a time, opposite the Roundhouse. The members of Inter-Action began working with local children. Arnold Wesker was trying to get Centre 42 at the Roundhouse up and running during the same period as Berman was starting his work in Camden. Outside of the Roundhouse Wesker put up a sign saying 'We need £190,000'. Outside Inter-Action's workspace on the windows opposite the Roundhouse a notice read, 'We don't need £190,000 yet'. At this time Inter-Action also occupied up to fifty derelict houses in the area of Chalk Farm and West Kentish Town. They



started by squatting which then led to them being given permission to occupy the empty council houses officially for 50p a week. This experience showed Berman how building and planning permission worked.

In 1971 Ed Berman moved the Ambiance Lunch Hour Theatre Club to an old electronic bingo hall in Rupert Street in London's West End and renamed the theatre club 'Almost-Free Theatre' (Itzin 1976: 5). The Almost-Free Theatre staged seasons including the first season of Gay plays in Britain and the first season of Women's plays since the Suffragette era. There was also a season on anti-nuclear themes. Berman wanted to promote what he referred to as 'libertarian' theatre on Black power, women's rights, and gay rights for groups who did not have a theatrical voice at the time.

Audience members were asked to pay what they could or at least one penny, but there was no upper limit, so admission was almost free. The ground floor seated sixty, or alternatively, one hundred if standing. The Almost Free Theatre did lunchtime and evening shows. Early productions at the Almost Free included Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*, and a T.O.C. production of a piece about the My Lai Massacre called *Games* by James Saunders.

Equity approached Berman and Mike Leigh to help unionise the Fringe. They drew up a proposed contract of work which Equity agreed to but when Equity tried to get Berman to apply it at the Almost Free Berman said he could not because the principle of the Almost Free was such that they could never guarantee making enough money to pay their employees Equity rates. All of the actors shared the box office takings at Almost Free. The stage-management crew, who were part of Inter-Action, were paid by the Arts Council grant the usual Inter-Action rates (originally a pound a day), plus housing, communal meals and expenses. Almost Free productions were artistically important and showcased to a long list of up and coming directors, playwrights, and actors all made possible by Berman's 1-in-3 rule

mentioned on the preceding page. This was Berman's justification for not paying Equity rates.

Berman was also a part of a local campaign to stop Joe Levy (of D.E.N. and J. Levy), who had bought up a lot of the property around Piccadilly Circus, from developing a high rise office complex. The campaign was ultimately successful and was supported by local businesses. Berman's Dogg's Troupe staged street theatre and community events and performances on local issues and larger concerns working especially with children and families, as well as in hospitals, old people's homes and other community venues. Dogg's Troupe was a versatile improvisation and performance group, the key to many projects. The core members were Berman, Patrick Barlow, Jeff Hoyle and Jim Hiley. Harriet Powell, later with Spare Tyre, was their musician. One of their themes was being twice two-faced. The troupe had headdresses with two faces going backwards, and one face going forward, plus the actor's own face.

In 1971 Berman negotiated with British Rail to take over several tracks on 10,000 acres of British Rail-owned land. The land was deemed unusable for development under modern planning legislation because of its proximity to the railway lines. Inter-Action established the first City Farm in Britain in Kentish Town North London. The farm was originally called the Fun Art Farm and rapidly became a model for city farms which sprang up across the country. As with most of Berman's initiatives the farm was intended as a model that could be recreated elsewhere. At one point there were over there were 200 such city farms throughout Britain based on Berman's original model. Members of Berman's Inter-Action lived and worked collectively at the Farm, and, importantly, were early environmentalists. When the organisation grew, Berman negotiated to take over more housing from Camden Council. Members, including Berman himself, lived communally and were paid equal, low wages.

In 1972 a Routemaster bus was converted to create a small theatre on the upper deck along with a cinema showing short films and slide-shows downstairs. The Fun Art Bus was inspired by the idea that theatre should interweave itself into the normal everyday movements of people. Mimed vignettes were acted out in the windows when the bus pulled up to a normal stop along a given route. Liz Leyh painted a picnic on the top of the bus so that it could be seen from above from the windows of tall office buildings and housing. Plays were shown upstairs in the smallest proscenium-arch theatre in the world. The sides of the bus were brightly painted with slogans and pictures of the passengers on the upper deck. The Fun Art Bus visited communities all over Britain and went to the Munich Olympics in 1972. It also participated in community festivals and toured Britain and Europe. The adverts were comprised of cartoons and there were sculptures in the luggage compartment. The tickets were poems by such poets as Roger McGough and Adrian Mitchell and short plays were also performed by T.O.C. and the Dogg's Troupe.

### *Women's Theatre*

The 1973 Women's Theatre Season introduced works by American writers including Sally Ordway, and new British writers such as Pam Gems and Michelene Wandor. Originally Berman approached a woman's street theatre group called Punch and Judy's because he wanted to organise a woman's play festival at Inter-Action's Almost Free Theatre. The lunchtime season of plays which followed in 1973 featured exclusively women playwrights, directors and performers. The women involved decided to work in an unconventional anti-hierarchical manner by contrast with the patriarchal/hierarchical manner they felt was a characteristic of a male-dominated commercial theatre establishment.

Women at the time were primarily only seen as 'actresses' and very few women with the notable exception of those mentioned in the previous chapter were involved in the technical

and directing side of theatre production. Berman convened a caucus for those who were interested in the development of women's theatre. Initially meetings were held every Sunday for a period of six months, meetings open to any woman who was interested in participating. Scripts were read and discussed. The women worked out the details of the season of plays for themselves and individuals were nominated to shadow those who were already working with the Almost Free. Women chose the plays but Berman reserved the right to the final selection in order to meet and maintain the necessary requirements for the continuation of Arts Council funding. His principles were strong, but he found he had to compromise them from time to time in face of the realities of organisational need.

Pam Gems and Michelene Wandor were involved in this process as well as many other women. Women directed, stage-managed and administered the season thereby also helping many of them to develop their careers. This season led in time to the formation of the influential theatre company Women's Theatre Group as well as to Monstrous Regiment. Women's Theatre Group immediately began work on a new play about three Portuguese women who had been persecuted for their progressive work on women's issues (Itzin 1980: 231). Plays produced during the season included works by Jennifer Phillips, Pam Gems, Michelene Wandor, Sally Ordway, Dinah Brooke and Jane Wibberley (Itzin 1980: 231).

### *Old Age Theatre*

In 1973 Berman's company established the Old Age Theatre Society or O.A.T.S.. The Old Age Theatre Society came about because Inter-Action was approached by MIND to do some work in an old people's home. Inter-Action gave out cameras and encouraged the residents to go to places they were not normally allowed and to take photographs of each other. The project was very successful and Berman noted that a team of four of the residents could function very well as a unit. Berman suggested to the organisation that they go on a tour of

old people's homes and lead similar-styled workshops. MIND refused because they said that the older people would not be able to do such a thing. Instead Berman got another group from Inter-Action to go in and do entertainments. He felt that it was a worthwhile exercise but not as potentially productive or empowering as allowing the older people to lead the work themselves (Berman, interview, 2010).

### *Gay Theatre*

Ed Berman facilitated caucuses of individuals who identified with women's and gay theatre in an effort to establish seasons of both. Those assembled worked out various roles themselves, shadowing Inter-Action staff where necessary.

In 1975 there was a season of Gay plays including work by Robert Patrick, Martin Sherman and Lawrence Collinson. It was the first such season of plays to be staged in Britain. The season led to the formation of gay theatre companies, principally Gay Sweatshop, Britain's first gay and lesbian theatre company (Itzin 1980: 234). Gay Sweatshop was a group of openly gay people who formed a professional theatre company which was possibly the first of its kind in the world. The aim of the company was to present material by the group that would liberate and not oppress. The aim was to make heterosexuals aware of the oppression they exercise and tolerate. The group intended to expose what they saw as media misrepresentations of the homosexual community and increase general awareness of the oppression of sexuality. Gay Sweatshop consisted of six individuals who performed, directed and administrated the group, and ten voluntary helpers who included back stage staff. Gay Sweatshop toured England, Scotland and Wales and performed both lunchtime and evening shows at Berman's Almost Free Theatre and the Institute of Contemporary Arts. All of their plays dealt with various aspects of gay people's lives in a truthful and non-stereotypical

manner. Berman published the season of gay plays under the title *Homosexual Acts*. Gay Sweatshop was eventually disbanded in 1997.

1976

Ed Berman became a British citizen in 1976 and then received an M.B.E. in 1979.

In 1976 Berman produced a season to mark the American bicentennial. Berman asked Tom Stoppard to write a play for the 1976 season and he wrote *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land* about Berman himself becoming a British citizen. The production was very successful and transferred from the lunchtime venue to the Arts Theatre in London's West End where it ran for four and half years. Berman also directed *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land* in Chicago and on Broadway. Inter-Action greatly benefited financially from the tours of *Dirty Linen*. Funds went straight back into the company coffers. Rochelle Owen's play *Homo* was also part of the season. New plays were contributed by Mike Stott (*Lenz* adapted from Buchner), Henry Livings (*Daft Sam*), Wolf Mankowitz (*The Irish Hebrew Lesson*) and Edward Bond (*The Bundle*).

By 1976 Inter-Action was established and doing all original work. The company received funding from the Arts Council because of the serious nature of T.O.C.'s work. At the National Theatre's new South Bank building opening in 1976 Sir Peter Hall asked Berman to provide entertainment outside of the theatre. The Dogg's Troup did Stoppard's 15-minute *Hamlet* and also had a 'Community Media Van' stationed there. They performed three to four hours a day outside the National Theatre. An actor playing Shakespeare was on hand. He gathered volumes of Shakespeare text and cut them up into one-inch squares, signed them and sold them off.

Technicians and administrators were core members of the Inter-Action co-op. Berman was Artistic Director and chose the plays and developed the Almost Free 'seasons' except for the Dogg's Troupe and T.O.C. productions which other colleagues directed. They attracted plays from Stoppard, Bond and Arden and leading actors wanted to work with them because of the quality of the plays. They did only British or World premieres and Berman was interested only in new work and not classical theatre. Berman helped produce a staged reading of the *Non-stop Connolly Show* (1976) in London, after it had shown in Dublin, although in Britain most producers had been reluctant to touch it because of the extreme political views of John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy.

Berman had good relationships with both Tory and Labour councils who helped Inter-Action to purchase properties for very little money. Inter-Action moved to its new location in Talacre Road, Kentish Town in 1976. The site was derelict but had been developed with sports and sitting-out areas where groups could do plays. It had been an old factory sweatshop from early in the twentieth century. Productions were rehearsed at the Talacre Road facility before transferring to the Rupert Street venue to perform for the public.

Berman wanted to build a permanent centre and the Talacre site had not been touched since the end of the war. He put in plans and got permission to develop the site in 1976. Berman used the designer Cedric Price and it worked out well although there were some defect issues which had to be resolved. The Centre was opened by Princess Anne. It had big open spaces and located down the road was the City Farm, free school and housing association.

The City Farm was run at that time by Berman as he was living there. There was an old timber shed turned into a riding school and a garage which was turned into a workshop. There had been allotments in the area previously and stables for the horses to turn the locomotives in the Roundhouse around so it did not take much work to re-engage these

buildings and their potential. The indoor riding school was for disabled children and local people took the old allotments. The local people kept goats, chickens and made yoghurt but they did not have cows because it was illegal to do so in the city. However they built concrete cows and horses for the local children to play on. Some horses were donated and some were liveried for locals and some were bought. Other City Farms opened up and they established a National Association of City Farms which they ran for a year before it devolved. The initiative was helped when British Rail agreed, as mentioned above, to release land for the City Farms project.

Inter-Action was set up as a co-operative, based on environmentalism and the collectives' ideals at the time. The operational rules were agreed and set down by everyone involved but over time the number of rules became almost impossible to work within. The utopian concepts were not really possible to attain in an urban environment. There were too many distractions in the city with new people coming in with new ideas and with relationships from the outside. Housing was also a problem and although they had ten houses the situation was not sustainable when children entered the situation. For example, the members of the collective were committed to mutual wills, inheritances and wages but in practice when someone inherited some money they tended to leave the co-op rather than part with it. Liz Leyh the sculptor put forward a motion that all of the women should have children at the same time so that the community could build a free school around them. The motion was passed but naturally the goal was impossible to achieve.

The co-op members on the whole were in their twenties and many had just finished university. Everyone lived and worked together but there were also Associates who came in to work but lived outside. The group was thought of as left-wing but they primarily thought of themselves as environmentalists. Everyone did their share of the cooking and cleaning. A fee of £1 per week was charged for room and board which later rose to £1 per day. The rule



of thumb was that no-one ever earned more than an Unemployment Benefit within the co-op. If people earned money from outside work they had to pool it within the co-op. In the end it was impossible, according to Berman, to remember the rules as there were so many of them. When Berman left in 1985, one of the last to leave, he had no cheque book, savings account, pension or credit. He then learned how to earn money through dealing in property.

### *Conclusion*

Berman's contribution to British alternative theatre includes introducing the work of a wide variety of new playwrights, actors and directors, many of whom went on to great prominence. He expanded the diversity of voices represented through his seasons at the Almost Free Theatre, inspiring the creation of many of the theatre groups which participated in the identity based theatre of the 1970s. With his lunchtime theatre, the Fun Art Bus and other initiatives he made theatre available to new audiences and bridged the boundary between life and art. Finally, much of his work was socially and politically active. With the city farms initiative he introduced a new form of environmentalism to British society.

Berman spent thirteen years (1967–1980) working in theatre, half the time on community and educational work. When he saw the opportunity to expand into film, publishing or video he would do so. He was interested in finding different ways for people to express themselves, especially those who seemingly had no voice. The Community Media Van was a good example of this. It had a radio telephone and went around Britain locating itself in public places. The telephone was connected through to leaders of local communities and members of the public were invited to speak to them about their grievances in public.

Since 1980 Berman has worked in Hong Kong, Germany, Holland, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, and India as a director and trainer. He advised Yale University on developing new social enterprises. In Russia he worked as an adviser to three State Ministers. In the UK he

has served as a non-party political special adviser on inner-city matters to Cabinet Ministers including Michael Heseltine and Tom King. Among many other activities Berman was the chairman of the successful Save Piccadilly Campaign. He continues to spend part of each year in India advising on social enterprise projects, mainly with women, and on environmental projects especially in the area of water development. His lasting contribution to alternative theatre in Britain, however, surely lies mainly in the large number of companies and artists whose futures were founded on his open-minded encouragement and producing skills at Inter-Action, his conception of the need for inclusiveness, his ability to work across established social, cultural, sexual and gender boundaries and his vision of the arts as central to community feeling, and health – and fun.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American age – unless you're an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans.

*Look Back in Anger (Osborne 1956: 6)*

The case has been made that American influence on the alternative theatre in Britain 1956-1980 was substantial. This chapter summarises the history of transmission in this area between the theatres of both nations, considers performance efficacies evident in that history in relation to literary theory in play during the study period, and concludes with questions of nationhood in relation to innovations in alternative theatre practice. It identifies and details defining characteristics of American influence during this period and, in doing so, seeks to establish credibility for the claims presented.

### *A History of Influence*

The data for this thesis has been collected through interviews, archival work and a review of existing literature on post-war British theatre including the alternative theatre movement. The main historical developments or phenomena referred to are the activities of the experimental theatre groups associated with Jim Haynes, Charles Marowitz, Nancy Meckler and Ed Berman, four expatriate American theatre practitioners living in Britain during the time period 1956 – 1980. In addition this thesis examines important American based groups, Living Theatre (1947), Open Theatre (1964), La MaMa (1960) and Bread and Puppet (1965), which performed in Britain and which made an impact during the same period.

In addition a wide range of indigenous British groups, Pip Simmons (1968), Foco Novo (1972-1989), Joint Stock (1974-1989), as well as institutions, RSC (1961), Royal Court (1956) and individuals such as Max Stafford-Clark and in passing Thelma Holt, John Arden, and the Portable playwrights (1968-1972) which in one way or another were influenced by

American exemplars. This study has described a collection of American experimental theatre and performance practices which came to influence the practices of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. Alternative theatre rejected the beliefs and expectations of traditional audiences and radically altered both the aesthetic and organisational basis upon which performance was created and its approach to and impact on cultural, social and political perceptions.

The opening chapters provided background and context for certain patterns that would later indicate American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain 1956-1980. They argued that theatre has often been used to define or challenge national values and the notion of the nation. Particularly at times of national crisis the theatre has served as a political and ideological tool to help reconfigure the identity of the nation. Chapter Three then concentrated on counter-hegemonic discourses in Britain and America between 1936 and 1956 and on groups that formulated a positive identity for marginalised or oppressed communities in Britain and America.

More broadly speaking, the number and variety of American theatrical works produced in London from 1936 to 1956, including those by both commercial and subsidised theatres, indicates an abiding interest in American theatre. Critics as well as audiences often shared this interest. Participatory performance involving the intermingling and democratising of activity in the actor/audience relationship would become a core characteristic of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. The trajectory of American influence on this performance practice in British alternative theatre can be traced from the inaugural April 1936 production of Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* at the London Unity Theatre. The interrelationship of space, stage, audience, actor and author affect the social and cultural efficacy of a given performance. With regard to this process, as Chapter Three has sought to argue, there was a direct exchange of American performance practices such as the Living

Newspaper to Britain during this period. Furthermore, the presence of thousands of American service personnel in Britain during wartime and the popularity of American theatrical genres in Britain after World War II introduced American cultural practices to British audiences. This along with British productions of American plays which pushed the boundaries of acceptable subject matter would lay the groundwork for future American influence on experimental theatre and performance practices in Britain during the period 1956-1980.

The influence of the four major American alternative groups which toured Britain during the 1960s and 1970s (Living Theatre, Open Theatre, La MaMa and Bread and Puppet) on the landscape of British alternative theatre was also critically important. This influence would serve to broaden the horizons of theatre practice in Britain and its engagement with British society. Several anti-Vietnam war protest marches in took place during this period, many of which could be argued to involve a certain level of theatricality and included the influence of theatre groups. In a more conventional sense perhaps Peter Brook's production of *US* at the Aldwych Theatre in 1966 was also indicative of this influence.

Jim Haynes from Louisiana was a key founder of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in 1963 and the Arts Lab on Drury Lane in 1967. Experimental venues were immensely important catalysts for change and exemplified innovation on both a technical and aesthetic level. In Edinburgh at the time that the Traverse was formed there was a longing for a permanent home for the excitement and the experimental work of the Festival to be extended throughout the year and this was the basis on which the Traverse Theatre and Gallery were founded. However, Haynes's influence ensured that his legacy as well as that of the Traverse would reach far beyond Edinburgh. This was quickly recognised and can be seen by Harold Hobson's statement, cited earlier, regarding the significance to theatre internationally when Haynes announced that he would leave the Traverse.

The Traverse Theatre in itself was one of the most important sub-cultural developments of its time and without Haynes, it is arguable, it would not have had the wider role, importance or impact it developed. Yet, Haynes's influence reached far wider after he left the Traverse. Many of those he influenced and supported remain key contributors to alternative British theatre even to this day. As discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, many identify the Drury Lane Arts Lab as the very birthplace of the alternative theatre movement in Britain. The Drury Lane Arts Lab was similar to the Traverse in that Haynes brought together at it a wide variety of activities including theatre, music, poetry, visual art. Perhaps most importantly, it was a space which created an intersection between ideas and creative individuals. As he brought these elements together Haynes generated new personal associations, collaborations and new forms of creative output.

The focus of Chapter Six was the impact and influence of Charles Marowitz's theatre practice on alternative theatre in Britain during his London period. Marowitz reinvigorated classics by rigorously bending and stretching masterpieces in the form of free adaptations and collages. Controversies associated with Marowitz affected the parameters of censorship, both official and unofficial, in Britain before and after the Theatres Act of 1968. This chapter also proposed that the life and career of Charles Marowitz during his time in Britain did not occur in isolation but within a complex fabric of associations with a wide range of individuals, institutions and communities. During his British period from 1956 to 1980 his theatre practice and criticism were influential in injecting radical creativity into British theatre. Marowitz's British period 1956-1980 was the prime period of his artistic and intellectual vitality. By analysing the events in his career during this period this study has endeavoured to arrive at a new perspective on this important figure in contemporary theatre.

Chapter Seven described how Nancy Meckler and her company Freehold were among the first to utilise the Drury Lane Arts Lab. Meckler moved to London on a permanent basis in

April 1968 after working at the La MaMa Plexus in New York. Meckler and her company Freehold were pioneers in Britain, using the body rather than words and conventional literary forms as their primary means of expression (Chambers 1980:106). And as Chapter Seven has argued, Freehold would help to introduce 'physical theatre', in a post-Brechtian sense to the British theatrical landscape and introduce a new kind of dramaturgy based on the physicalisation of language. Meckler's other major contribution was in elevating the status of women as directors, and as the primary focus of theatre and performance pieces. Meckler's early career in Britain can also be seen within the context of a generational shift whose energy coalesced in Britain and America largely around the issue of Civil Rights, Women's Rights and a reaction to American involvement in Vietnam.

Chapter Eight has described how Ed Berman and his company Inter-Action Productions were extremely influential in pioneering unconventional modes of community performance in unconventional locations for non-traditional theatre going audiences. Berman began as a playwright and in 1968 started the first permanent lunchtime theatre in the Britain. Over the next decade the company would be responsible for an extremely prolific range of community arts and professional theatre activities in dozens of venues. This included the activities of the British American Repertory Company. As mentioned in Chapter Eight the British American Repertory Company was the first joint company approved by both Equity unions in both countries and was designed for non-star actors and stage staff. Berman set up the British-American theatre company creating an exchange of actors and stage managers and the company was hosted by both nations' embassies on either side of the Atlantic. They performed *Dirty Linen* and *Newfoundland* and *Dogg's Hamlet Cahoots Macbeth* which Tom Stoppard had developed with other plays for Berman's theatres.

Further, as described in Chapter Eight Berman's contribution to the British alternative theatre 1956-1980 also included introducing the work of a wide variety of new playwrights,

actors and directors, many of whom went on to great prominence. Berman expanded the diversity of voices represented through his seasons at the Almost Free Theatre which then inspired the creation of many of the theatre groups which participated in the identity-based theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. With his lunchtime theatre, the Fun Art Bus and other initiatives he made theatre available to new audiences and bridged the boundary between the daily life of communities and art. Finally, much of Berman's work was socially and politically active and with the city farms initiative he introduced a new form of environmentalism to British society. His lasting contribution to alternative theatre in Britain, however, lies mainly in the large number of companies and artists whose futures were founded on his open-minded encouragement and producing skills at Inter-Action, his conception of the need for inclusiveness, of working across established social, cultural, sexual and gender boundaries and his vision of the arts as central to community feeling and health.

### *Conclusion*

Several sources have pointed out that in Britain with subsidised theatre, alternative practices get absorbed very quickly (Meckler, 2012). After World War II, Britain was faced with austerity and was socially conservative. The population wanted to feel safe and secure and for their children to grow up in an ideal structured environment. During the 1950s America made up six percent of the global population but at the same time was responsible for fifty percent of global manufacturing and industry. This unprecedented economic growth in part is why what we now refer to as youth culture started in America. America was a materialist culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The community of young American expatriates included, besides such highly influential figures as Jim Haynes, Charles Marowitz, Ed Berman and Nancy Meckler, other important



figures like Michael Rudman, Bernard Pomerance, Jack Henry Moore, Walter Donohue and Mike Alfreds who have been mentioned in passing. They all knew each other and were all working on and shaping the Fringe. In addition, *Stages in the Revolution* (1980) along with other theatre scholarship produced by the late American editor and critic Catherine Itzin (*The Alternative Theatre Directory*, *Theatre Quarterly*) can be seen as evidence that American influence on the alternative theatre movement in Britain (1956 – 1980) also reached the level of scholarly exchange and historicising.

Young Britons found American culture exciting. It was a youth culture and it represented casual living. At the time the Living Theatre first toured through Europe in 1964, Britain had nothing like that. Nobody was doing that sort of practice and there was a certain affinity with American culture, because American culture was seen as different, exciting and inventive. America had Andy Warhol and artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Dine. From outside the world of theatre as traditionally defined came the influence of the ‘Happening’ as pioneered in the 1950s by such American figures as Allan Kaprow and Jim Dine from the visual arts and John Cage from music which incorporated notions of indeterminacy and improvisation.

Yet, there is even a larger discussion to be had on the topic of American influence on British Theatre. There have been a number of studies of post-war British theatre as well as the alternative theatre movement in Britain including Andrew Davies’ *Other Theatres* (1987), Baz Kershaw’s *The Politics of Performance* (1992) and Dominic Shellard’s *British Theatre Since the War* (1999). However, these studies tend to address the influence of French theatre or indigenous developments but do not examine American influence in detail. This study has contributed to the understanding of the forces which have shaped contemporary British theatre by addressing the existing gap in theatre scholarship

It is also important, however, to take into account that America also depends on Britain in important ways and that this might be the subject of a different thesis. Joseph Papp, for example, was an important advocate for free public theatre and established the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theatre in 1967 with the intention of imitating the London branch of the Royal Shakespeare Company in putting on contemporary productions aimed at an audience comprised of a large cross-section of society. The festival opened on 29 October 1967 with *American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*. The production moved to a nightclub, then was completely restructured by former Cafe La MaMa director Tom O'Horgan and transferred to Broadway as *Hair*. Papp did not prioritise pleasing conventional middle-class Broadway audiences with his work but rather he was interested in connecting with the younger generation who were concerned with contemporary issues and changing society. Britain offered an example of the way in which theatrical innovation advanced across a broad front in the new civic theatres which were essentially a legacy of the war.

What the groups and individuals outlined in this study did was to engender an idealism in which a large number of people, many of whom were young and impressionable, responded. It may have been naive but there was perhaps something liberating and constructive about its energy. It may have been simplistic but it served as a useful corrective to the cynicism inherited from the previous generation. Such a movement dealt in grand generalisations about human life and how people should try and live with one another. It elevated social debate by addressing fundamental issues and how spirituality could be returned to a world that had become intensely materialistic. The younger generation thought that the way to make revolution work was to change the interaction between individuals and to question the bedrock values which produced the status quo. It is the intellectual vestiges of this period which continue to influence contemporary behaviour both private and public (Marwick 1998). The American influences outlined in this thesis were core to this process.

## ABBREVIATIONS

|      |                                     |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| BLSA | British Library Sound Archive       |
| DWIC | David Weinberg Interview Collection |
| NMC  | Nancy Meckler Collection            |
| RDA  | Richard Demarco Archive             |
| UH   | Unfinished Histories                |

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Date: 5 June 2011  
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Interviewer: David Weinberg

Interviewee: Jim Haynes  
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Technician: Jessica Higgs

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Interviewee: Max Stafford-Clark

Date: 8 December 2009

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Interviewee: Roland Rees

Date: 10 December 2009, 11 January 2010 and 5 April 2011

Location: Peckham, London

Interviewer: Susan Croft

Recorded by: Jessica Higgs

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Interviewee: Ed Berman

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2010 and 13<sup>th</sup> February 2011

Location: Isle of Dogs, London

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Recorded by: Jessica Higgs

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Interviewee: Beth Porter

Date & place: 24 February 2011, Frant, Sussex

Interviewer: Susan Croft

Recorded by: Jessica Higgs

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Unfinished Histories Exhibition Event

Speaker: Dr Susan Croft

Date: 8 April 2014

Location: Holborn Library

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## Appendix One

### Ian Brown Interview

2 February 2011

#### Kingston University

**David Weinberg:** This is David Weinberg and I'm interviewing Professor Ian Brown at Kingston University. It is the 2nd of February 2011.

Thank you, Professor Brown for agreeing to our interview. I thought we would start...I was wondering if you could be willing to describe your experiences working with Traverse Theatre Workshop and with Joint Stock. I thought that that would be a good place to start.

**Professor Ian Brown:** I did work with the Traverse Workshop, which became Joint Stock. It arose in late 1969, when a play I had written had come to Max Stafford-Clark's attention, and he asked to meet me to talk about writing. That particular play went on to a much later production, in another theatre. But at that point Max and I got friendly. I was working on another play, *Carnegie*, which he saw a draft of and gave me some feedback on.

So when, in the second quarter of 1970, he set up the Traverse Workshop Company, he asked me to follow along, during the first set of devising processes. He said, 'Come along and see how you can help out'.

The company was set up because Max got very frustrated running the Traverse. He was then artistic director of the Traverse, with frustrations that went past running a building. He wanted to develop some kind of ensemble company from a number of actors he'd used already in Traverse productions.

These things often happen by serendipity. It was the moment when the Traverse was moving from its old original building in James Court down to the second building in the Grassmarket. It was possible for Mike Rudman, who then came to take over from Max, to have a new theatre, but for Max to then use old theatre as his space.

They all lived in there. They used the old bar for housing space. It was very nice for housing space. Someone lived in the restaurant, someone lived in the box office, and someone lived in the admin offices. I think probably someone actually lived in the theatre. Rehearsals took place in what was the gallery. It was converted into a place where they could live together, and the influence, as I understand it, was very much Ellen Stewart.

**David:** Who just passed away last week.

**Ian:** I was sorry to hear that. I was sorry to see that. I guess she was...

**David:** Ninety-four.

**Ian:** Ninety-four, a really good age. She always seemed to be a really young person. Obviously, she started in her mid-40s, but people can be young in their mid-40s. [laughs]

This was in the back of Max's mind, and a lot of people were looking at the idea of ensemble at the time, but La MaMa was a great inspiration.

**David:** So La MaMa and Ellen Stewart were a great inspiration for Max Stafford-Clark and the Traverse Theatre Workshop.

**Ian:** I believe so. Max would confirm this or not, but certainly in any conversation that was what I gathered.

**David:** Were there any particular experimental practices or was it certain playwrights?

**Ian:** I think we were all taken with Paul Foster. The shows that came across were *Futz* and *Tom Paine*. You can check the dates, but I think those are the two shows, and they had really interested us.

In addition, around that time at the Edinburgh Festival, Grotowski brought his company with *Acropolis*. I suppose it would be fair to say collective-focused and group-devising theatre were in the air at the time. It might be hard to see a specific strand of a particular company that led things forward, but there unquestionably was a strong sense that that was a way to go forward.

**David:** In a postwar period, have you seen an evolution in the social and political ecology that underpins the making of theatre or experimental theatre in Scotland? How much do you think that would be a result of the Edinburgh Festival or the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and how much of indigenous groups like the Edinburgh Gateway Company and similar?

**Ian:** I think it's both, inevitably.

If you asked, 'What was the biggest influence in the second half of the twentieth century'? it would have to be the Edinburgh Festival. It would have to be. It's a massive...it's one of the biggest in the world still.

It was postwar, at a time when everyone was very down. The first festival, they actually had to go to people in Edinburgh and say 'Would you put them up?' With people low on food because food was rationed, it was an extraordinary social event, political event, and a soupçon of hope after a dreadful war. That was happening.

At the same, and this is where the Gateway was interesting in lots of ways, there was an interest in indigenous drama, which had been marginalised by the industrial power of the West End – and the London touring scene, which developed out of and was often linked into the West End. You had pre-London tours, post-London tours, post-West End tours, and all of that going on.

There were reps, and there was a rep in Edinburgh called the Wilson Barrett Company, which appeared for seasons in the Lyceum Theatre, and sometimes went to Glasgow and appeared. The point about the Gateway is that it became an indigenous rep, following ultimately the example of the work of Annie Horniman in Manchester.

The other strand that it's important we not forget is the work of Glasgow Unity Theatre, which was influenced by popular theatre, but also very influenced by the work of left-leaning companies like Living Newspaper in America or the various radical companies that worked with Brecht in Germany before he was exiled.

It's interesting, but one of the first productions of the Unity Theatre was a Scottish adaptation of *The Lower Depths*, so there was a clear intellectual, international – and it was partly experimental – company, or some kind of experimental company, and interested in radical



theatre in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century. You've got those strands working side by side.

Unity was closed in 1951, because it ran into some financial issues with its funding bodies.

**David:** There was also the Scottish National Players during the interwar period.

**Ian:** The interwar period. They were very interested in working in Scots language for the plays for their company. That's important. Tyrone Guthrie, who started the Guthrie in Minneapolis eventually, was one of its early directors. He was a professional, but most people working in that were amateurs and that was a problem, in terms of getting commitment of time and managing to get on the road to tour.

Then you're looking at the issue of the Scottish Literary Renaissance -- MacDiarmid, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Compton Mackenzie, writers of that period, twenties, thirties, forties, and into the fifties. It's getting very complicated here, but part of the nexus is that a lot of that was -- not retrogressive, but certainly looked back to look forward.

The famous quote of MacDiarmid's is 'Not Burns but Dunbar'. That was to say: not the famous Robert Burns, with all the sentimentality that got attached to him -- no fault of his -- but William Dunbar, who was a great Renaissance poet. All of these things were bubbling around in the fifties and really fell into cultural splits.

You had the reps in Scotland, which were seen as flowing out of the British rep system, but also having a very strong Scottish flavour out of the Literary Renaissance. You had the socialist Unity Theatre, which had been suppressed, but which was much remembered, and many of these actors had moved into the rep system.

That was, if you like, the establishment, beyond which, even more established, were touring theatres that were putting on plays, often West End, pre-West End, post-West end, and owned by chains of touring companies.

**David:** Commercial sector

**Ian:** Absolutely, the commercial sector. Then the Festival had come along and just shook things up. At first, the Unity was not invited. In fact, Unity was never invited to be part of the Edinburgh Festival, as it came to be called very quickly, the 'Official Festival'. But they were one of the six or seven companies that set up the beginnings of the Fringe.

Here you're seeing the patterns going on, the shifting influences and the importance of groups and members of theatre groups, which agitated for its move forward. This was all going on. By the time -- to jump forward -- that the sixties came, the Festival had completely radicalised and opened up the vision and potential in Scotland. Not always a delivery, but the vision of potential.

There was the famous Writer's Conferences in 1962, of which both Hugh MacDiarmid and Alexander Trocchi, the odd couple, were both present. When MacDiarmid famously called Trocchi 'cosmopolitan scum'. [laughs] Trocchi called MacDiarmid 'stale porridge'.

The simple fact of the matter is that MacDiarmid did look across the Atlantic. MacDiarmid welcomed the Beat poets in the late fifties, but there was a sense of which my generation now coming in...I was born in 1945 and I was coming to university in 1963. I was getting to know

the Edinburgh Festival and getting to know what was going on. The international influence was established

At that time, there was just a bubbling up, and the Traverse is an example, of influences. It was almost as if, for a period of time the indigenous theatre, which had developed its own voice besides commercial theatre, now found it could have a more internationalised 'own voice'.

I think you know that the Gateway program included international classics, or major contemporary American classics. It wasn't parochial, but the kinds of experiments that were going on with Living Theatre wouldn't have suited The Gateway any more than it would suit most rep theatres now. Mostly studio theatres, experimental, have that work on.

But, the Festival Fringe opened, and the Traverse, which grew out of Jim Haynes, an American GI...I'm not sure if it was the Air Force or Army.

**David:** He was in the Air Force. He had listened to Russian-language transmissions in Barksdale Air Force base in Louisiana.

**Ian:** There you have that influence going on. He saw the festival as a wonderful patch him to work in – for a period of time, not forever.

He got together with a very important – what you'd call now a producer figure and animateur – called Richard Demarco, who was also one of the co-founders of The Traverse, who set up a very influential gallery, who invited Joseph Beuys to Edinburgh, who invited in Kantor. I think he introduced Kantor to Britain, as it were. He had a very good eye, especially for European experimentalism.

All of that was happening because of the indigenous theatre and the interaction with the International Festival and the Fringe. The Fringe, even in that day, although it was still very much a particular strand, was really influential.

**David:** What were some of the early American productions that you saw? What were the first American plays that you could become aware of, performed in Scotland, or playwrights that Scottish audiences were interested in seeing, or companies were interested in producing?

**Ian:** I have to really scratch my head to think about which I first saw. I can say I would read and know about Miller, Williams – in particular those two – and these were taught in the university, when I went there in the mid-sixties.

The actual company that influenced me most though, in terms of thinking about alternative theatrical practice, would probably be La MaMa. A bit later, Andre Gregory brought his version of *Alice in Wonderland* to Edinburgh. It was somewhere like 1972 or 1973. Amazingly – I'd completely forgotten this, but I checked back in records recently – Meryl Streep was in that company.

My perception of American theatre, in terms of companies I saw, was very much that strand of work rather than Broadway.

**David:** In terms of your own writing and theatre practice, is it possible to identify if these groups or these practices changed your own practice or the way you engaged with your theatre practice?

**Ian:** Oh, absolutely. I began as a young playwright, an undergraduate, writing in English. I don't have these plays. I got rid of them. They were just my version of a second-hand try at comedy, not of interest, I would have said, to man or beast.

Simultaneously, I'd explored the idea of a documentary drama. The first one I did was about the disaster at Aberfan. You may have read of that. Well over a hundred children were swallowed by a pit spoil heap that came tumbling down the hill unexpectedly and engulfed a school. It was outrageous. It had been bad management, and streams had probably culverted underneath the pit spoil heaps. It was just waiting one day to become a landslide. Of course, it was built right above the village school. A dreadful story.

I did a piece just within my university department, at the university theatre about that, which was interlinked with songs which I wrote, and which a fellow student who was a folk-song expert put music to from traditional songs.

I was interested in alternative ways of structuring, at that point, beginning to go that way. I can say that the play that Max was interested in was a play about Mary Queen of Scots, the first draft of which I wrote in Scots. That was quite an important breakthrough for me in 1967. Also, it was very sentimental. It was a vast drama. It was just ridiculous, I thought, and still think.

Max liked some of it. He seemed to think there was something in it that said I might be able to write. The next thing I worked on was very influenced by the idea of the cutting up, of juxtaposition, of jump-cutting song, narrative, or factual material, dramatic material. That became *Carnegie*, which was produced in 1973 at The Lyceum.

Max had an early draft of that and again encouraged me to write. I know that was very much influenced by what I'd picked up by then or heard about La MaMa's way of operating with historical material, but also with work for Peter Weiss particularly 'The Song of the Lusitanian Bogey'.

Anyway, moving on. The particular influence for me was a Foster show. It was, I think, specifically the University of Southern California, which came to the Fringe regularly in those years doing Paul Foster's *Elizabeth the First*, and the way that handled history really interested me. I went back to *Mary* and I rewrote it – in many ways not modelled on that but inspired by that, if I can make that distinction.

**David:** It's very interesting. Would you say the reception to experimental playwriting or new writing in Scotland has gotten better?

**Ian:** It was always quite positive. Bear in mind that the first Traverse had 60-odd seats. It was tiny. They moved to the 'big' second Traverse, which had as many as a hundred. There was a lot of interest in doing that kind of work. When Ricky Demarco brought across Kantor, he would sell out I think. Certainly, I remember going to full houses, so I think there was an interest.

Inevitably, with experimental theatre, you're not necessarily dealing with the vast body that would go to traditional theatre. That's what experimental means. It may take time for people to come round to it, but that influences the main body. I always think of it as the R&D, the research and development of theatre.

When I was in charge of the Drama Department at the Arts Council in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I always felt it was important to support the new writing schemes and the project schemes for new companies because out of them came the talent for the next generation.

**David:** It's the avant-garde or advanced guard. It's the cutting edge.

**Ian:** Sure. I think we were conscious of that. At the same time, there was the work of people like Mnouchkine, of which we were all conscious. You mentioned Weiss. You mentioned Mnouchkine.

It's also interesting. I mentioned Peter Weiss's 'Song of the Lusitanian Bogey', but I saw it in an American production by the Negro Ensemble of New York, as it then called itself. I've no idea if that company still survives, and it probably would have changed its name if it does, but that was a major company. It was brought across by Peter Daubeny for his World Theatre Season in the 1960s.

**David:** I'm interested in exploring this idea of cultural domination and perhaps globalisation. There's quite a bit of reading and research I need to do into this topic, but I know there are US military bases throughout Britain and in Scotland. I know you've written in Scots and are interested in indigenous Scottish Celtic language.

Have you seen any signs or evidence of cultural domination or American cultural domination through TV and film that has had an adverse impact on indigenous Scottish playwriting? Or, would you say that there is a healthy Celtic-language theatre and interest in indigenous Scottish playwriting?

**Ian:** Yes. Let me talk about the Gaelic first.

**David:** Perhaps a paradox between them both.

**Ian:** I think a paradox is a good word. We'll come to Gaelic in a minute. Scots and English are both Germanic languages, a bit like the relationship and the inter-comprehensibility of Swedish and Norwegian. The process of American influence, it's been less a worry for Scottish theatre than West End influence.

A lot of very good people go down to London to work. If you actually think about the difference, and I think I've mentioned this before, between an actor like Ian Richardson – great, great classical actor, you wouldn't even know he was Scots when he spoke – and a later, great actor like Bill Paterson who can speak, if you wish, in English pronunciation, but keeps his own voice.

I think there was a generational shift, and I think there's only ten or twelve years between them in age. The same generation as Bill Paterson is the great actor Brian Cox, who again, is undoubtedly, indisputably Scottish, but can do Russian...

**David:** He can do anything.

**Ian:** ...and is essentially a Hollywood film star but constantly returns. I think it's that capacity to retain your roots are that counteracts globalisation.

The bigger issue was the relationship of England and Scotland within the union that makes up the so-called United Kingdom. To go back to my own experience, half of my work is in

English, half is in Scots. Both English and Scots are Scotland's languages. I've been enriched by that, and I'm trying, as you know, to learn Gaelic.

What happened in Gaelic is slightly different, in that Gaelic did not have a substantial theatrical drama until the twentieth century. Even then, it was the pioneers who decided it was important have that drama, a little in the way that, in Ireland in the late nineteenth century, some of the Irish set out to write plays about Ireland, which apart from Boucicault's melodramas, things like *The Shaugraun*, had not existed.

If we think of the great Irish playwright of the eighteenth century, it's Richard Brinsley Sheridan. You wouldn't know he's Irish.

**David:** There are also stereotypes of the stage Irishman, and so on.

**Ian:** And the stage Welshman and the stage Scotsman, and so on. Yes, absolutely, you're right.

A lot of what the twentieth century is about, certainly postwar, was breaking out of those stereotypes and breaking out of an industrial straitjacket, which was not driven by Hollywood or Broadway, but driven by the West End.

In some senses, the discovery of Miller was a relief, because he wasn't an English playwright that you had to follow. He was clearly a playwright of world importance, writing in English but not English. You then discover, by the time you get to the 1980s, which is a bit after the period we're talking about at the moment, that there's a kind of capacity for synergy.

I don't know if you've come across the television series, *Your Cheatin' Heart*. I commend it to you. It's by the playwright John Byrne, who wrote *The Slab Boys*. *Your Cheatin' Heart* is half American, half Scottish, and Byrne embraces Americanism. Actually, if you're like me and were brought up in the 1940s and 1950s in Scotland, you went to the cinema, you saw lots of American films.

You saw British films, you saw some that were Scottish, but predominantly it was British and American films of one kind or another. You don't deny yourself. You don't say it didn't happen. You say, 'But it didn't stop me being Scottish. It didn't stop me knowing my culture, but somehow influenced and interpenetrated my culture'. That's where John Byrne sits.

**David:** Thank you, Professor Brown. I think that's very helpful. Is there anything you'd like to add or any questions?

[crosstalk]

**Ian:** By all means, come back if there's anything else you want to talk about.

The one thing I would say is that, to my perception, after the war, two things happened. One was a much more clearly considered transatlantic theatre community. I know it existed way back, and I know you had the nineteenth century theatre riots in New York between the British actor and the American actor, but the transatlantic theatre community became much more developed, partly because of the repertory movement, which took those plays out into the regions.

The second thing that happened in Scotland was that we suddenly became much more conscious of the European experiment. In doing your thesis, one of the things I would

counsel is don't take your eye off what was coming from Europe, as well, because Grotowski certainly influenced Gregory, surely. Surely he influenced Gregory. It's an interpenetration.

**David:** Great. Thanks a lot.

**Ian:** OK.

**David:** OK, signing off.

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**Appendix Two**  
**Colin Chambers Interview**  
**16 February 2011**  
**Kingston University**

**Professor Colin Chambers:** The key point about the context of British interwar radical theatre was the Russian revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union which became if you like the fountainhead for those on the Left who had followed the Communist parties around the world. So it was an overtly internationalist outlook. Often in Britain, because it was an island, it had been quite insular in terms of its culture, but the Left that identified with the Soviet Union had an international outlook, therefore was looking to other places, not only for ideas but for cultural material.

**David Weinberg:** Did Socialism in Britain have popular appeal as a reaction to the class system?

**Colin:** Yes. And it was very strong, as you'd expect, in the working class districts of the country, particularly around mining and shipbuilding in Wales and in Scotland and in the Northeast and Northwest of England. The Southeast was – although it had some radical outposts as it were – generally where the rich lived and worked. So it was more diluted, if you like in that part of the world. But there was a strong working class culture within the British Isles, which really came out of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Chartist movement and Self-Help and Co-operative movements. So, I suppose its distinctive features were that it was collective and it was about the self-organisation, and this carried on through to the theatre movement. And it valued culture. I should mention within that another strand: that was the emigration to this country, to the United Kingdom, of Jews from Central Eastern Europe who also value culture in their own way, partly as a means of survival, but also because that was part of their historic cultural dispensation. And they settled in particular areas – and this is important in terms of Unity – in London, in the East End, which had at that time quite a considerable Jewish population. They had a tradition of Left Wing activity, with a Socialist, Communist or Anarchist background, and of cultural activity within that. So we've got a situation where, post the Russian revolution, culture becomes seen as a weapon in the class struggle and because of the nature of the literacy of the Soviet Union there is quite an emphasis on agitational propaganda and the agit-prop mode filters across through Germany and into America and particular things like the Living Newspaper. We've talked before about the importance of the Living Newspaper in countering the main means of mass communication of the time, which was the printed word, which was the newspaper. We're talking pre-radio, pre-television, certainly pre-email, pre-Twitter, pre-Facebook and all of that.

**David:** The origins of the BBC have a Left Wing basis?

**Colin:** Certainly liberal, in a radical liberal tradition more than left. They weren't collectivist and in the time we're talking about the Left was distinguished as a collectivist way of looking at the world, because of the nature of factory production, or of shipbuilding, whatever. You were with a mass of people producing stuff. So, the means of production, in a sense, led to the nature of the ideological framework the people worked within. And so, to come back to the theatre bit, in Britain there was a whole movement up and down the country, which came together, called the Workers Theatre Movement, which participated in International Theatre Olympiads. One of them was in Moscow where they would meet people from all the other

countries that were there, including Americans. And one of the reasons that America became important is because obviously they wrote and worked in English, so for the British groups they could get material that was published in the magazines of this movement. Whereas, the German and the Russian material they couldn't get or didn't understand. So, that was one issue why it was important and the American play movement had a reasonable publishing apparatus, and they particularly published short plays, which suited the Left theatre in Britain because a lot of their work wasn't in conventional theatre terms, so that the short play was very popular. But you had a mixture of styles at this point. Living Newspaper came out of the agit-prop world. One of the main features of the American writing was that it added into agit-prop this idea of realism or naturalism, producing believable characters. So it wasn't just an ideological picture: it wasn't just representatives of a class, although they were also class representatives, but they were real human beings as well as that. And that is very appealing particularly to the cultures that were much more, if you like, in one sense advanced. So, you got Britain and America as industrialised nations with a culture, with Dickens and Melville, so that it wasn't likely that they would sustain a purely symbolic type of theatrical representation very long.

**David:** Did that have to do with the application of Stanislavski's theories and practices?

**Colin:** It did to some extent, yes, but again it becomes complicated, because of the émigrés. Moscow Art Theatre visited America and then some stayed, and so you had a particular form of Stanislavski work that took root in America and that affected a lot of the theatre in the States, which in its turn came through to Britain, through that route.

**David:** I think there was a reaction by a critic in the London *Times* when the Group Theatre came to London, that they were not familiar with this kind of acting, that it was new to Britain. That's kind of multifaceted. It has to do with Stanislavski practice, but also the political side of things.

**Colin:** Well, the British theatre was incredibly narrow and yet multilayered, because British theatre could look back to Shakespeare, Marlowe, Johnson, Middleton, Sheridan, Shaw, Oscar Wilde. British theatre people thought of themselves as the supreme theatre culture in the world. And some people might say that's true. But, the downside of that was that they didn't look to anybody else.

**David:** New playwrights.

**Colin:** Yeah, they thought they could do it all themselves, as it were. And they were very resistant; the British theatre's always been resistant to ideas. And one of the great strengths of the British theatre, if you like, is its pragmatic side. Shakespeare was an actor as well as a businessman, as well as a playwright. And theory, which was often identified with the Germans, from Lessing on, was something a lot of British theatre people didn't like. Except the people on the left, who did like ideas. So you had another mismatch there between the left of British theatre and the mainstream British theatre. In mainstream British theatre, for example, when a French company came over which was Copeau-based, certain people thought this is wonderful, but a lot of them thought this is foreign and it's not what our theatre's about. So Stanislavski – and in a sense the same happened later with Brecht – was resisted a bit as a fuff from abroad. It's more complicated than that, but that gives you a flavour of the time. I mean with Unity – we're jumping slightly – Unity took on Stanislavski and, in fact, had a school in which Stanislavski was taught and that was because one of the



directors at Unity, Herbert Marshall, was a Russian-speaker, had been in Russia, and had studied in Moscow, and he was able to communicate. I mean he translated Mayakovsky and a whole lot of other people. So there were all sorts of connections like that. Unity's take on Stanislavski was very different to what became known as the Method. As we know, Stanislavski himself changed his views, developed his views. It's very hard to talk about Stanislavski as a complete whole without seeing not so much contradiction as development. Stanislavski towards the end of his life is very different from early Stanislavski. But you're right, Stanislavski had not taken root in Britain at the time when the American influence through Unity was being felt. Unity came out of the Worker's Theatre Movement. Primarily the core was a group of rebel players. It drew in other people: there was a Yiddish theatre group, a couple of others. The main difference, which was in one sense an ideological one – and it represents, rather crudely speaking, the shift from what you might call the 'Red period' to the 'Popular Front period' – was the view in the Red period, which is the period in the Second World War, that you should have no compromise at all, you only work with people who are on your side. You either are, as it were, with us or against us: you don't have alliances.

**David:** Did that change out of necessity after the Nazis took power?

**Colin:** Yeah, and the international Communist movement changed its position mainly, to an extent, through a major speech by the Bulgarian Dimitrov. So you had this period: it's like the Red period, when everybody was called Red Megaphones, red this, red that. And, indeed in the British Labour movement, if you were in the Labour party you were considered to be a social fascist at one point, by the extreme left, what we would now consider to be Stalinists. So there were quite hard-line ideological differences. In theatrical terms, the big difference was that they didn't believe in performing inside theatres. It all had to be taken to the workers at their place of work, or where they went socially. Street theatre, outside factory gates, this sort of thing. People who were in Rebel Players and others that joined them believed that that was limiting what theatre could do and they broke with the Workers Theatre Movement, wanted to move beyond agit-prop and they found the place in North London, and they then built their own theatre, with help from the Workers. I don't need to go through all that, because that's in the book.

**David:** How important was Unity Theatre in establishing the alternative theatre movement a generation later? I know Unity lasted for thirty or forty years.

**Colin:** Well, it was important because it had a nationwide presence. It was part of a movement, as was Workers Theatre Movement, which you could find all over the country. At its height, there was something like 270 groups, which is amazing. Had its own magazine; had its own drama school; it had some accounts. It had its own complete apparatus, if you like.

**David:** But this whole idea of alternative theatre... alternative to what? It's really the alternative to commercial, West End theatre and that really was established with Unity.

**Colin:** Yes. Unity said, we're not against... they had this view which is certainly compatible with a lot of Marxist views on culture, that there are classics which concern the interests of the people but primarily that the West End theatre was there to entertain the bourgeoisie, and the people who supported the bourgeoisie. And they didn't want anything to do with it. So it was always an amateur theatre, except when very briefly they went professional, which was

actually to do with the Group Theatre's influence. For most of its life it was an amateur enterprise. In the very early days they didn't publish the names of the actors, so all that collectivist idea prevailed. But the key problem for them was finding the right material. *Waiting for Lefty* combined the agit-prop with the naturalistic, and that became their calling card.

**David:** I'm curious though, once the Unity Theatre became established, did it continue its interest in American plays or were there...?

**Colin:** Well they did both. As you know, in the first couple of years a lot of their plays they found from America.

**David:** The first three productions were American.

**Colin:** From the *Theatre Magazine*. People like Irwin Shaw and Albert Maltz were...

**David:** But then you have the taxi driver playwrights and...

**Colin:** They were trying to develop: they wanted to do their own plays. Because at one level you could do a play about a trade union situation, because that was a common experience. Because you were playing often to people from trade unions, which is why *Lefty* works. Beyond that, you wanted to do plays that spoke to your own people, and they did develop their own. If you look at the repertoire list, it's not that American plays cease to be dominant, but they don't drop out altogether. And in fact, just after the end of the war, there's another crop of American plays that get put on partly because again there was a sense of solidarity when the Cold War hit after the Iron Curtain, and, interestingly, Unity do both plays from the Soviet Union and plays from America. A play called *Dragnet* is one; *Longitude 49* by Herb Tank was another. So, they keep their interest, but it's more than part of a wider repertoire. Whereas at the beginning they're heavily reliant on America, after the war they take American plays that they think are interesting, but they're not looking solely to America to provide them with stuff. *Living Newspaper* is very important to them. We talked about that, and that, although it doesn't originate in America, the American example was the most important one for them, partly because it was in English and you could get the scripts, which they then developed and wrote their own, as you know. But as a genre, *Living Newspaper* was very important, and the Americans were very important. The visit by the Group Theatre was important. Their view was you've got to play to as many people as you can, if you believe in your message; don't discriminate in your audience. And that's why they urged them to go professional. That's more complicated because, if the Second World War hadn't happened, it might've worked, but because of the war a lot of things happened, and when they went professional they came out of a situation where they weren't actually strong enough to support it properly. And it lost money and it only lasted for about a year and it collapsed. So, repertoire was important, genre is important, as was the *Living Newspaper*. Those are probably the three most critical things.

**David:** We've talked about the internationalist sentiment and that aspect of things, and many scholars have written about the alternative theatre movement in Britain emerging out of, for instance, international counter-culture. I'm curious how much of that is true and how much is hyperbole, rhetoric, people that have a particular political point of view. Is it possible to trace the national origins of certain experimental theatre practices?

**Colin:** What happened on the left is that in the Cold War America became the enemy, which it wasn't in the 30s. Although it was a capitalist country and it was the Great Depression and so on, it wasn't seen as the enemy, partly because, while Capitalism was the enemy, the British Empire was still the supreme example of that. Because of what happened in the war, which virtually bankrupted Britain, and the fact that America came out of the war strong, the American Empire, if you like, became the important Empire, once the British Empire was declining and India gained its independence, Pakistan was created and so on. You know the history of that. So, if you were British, on some visceral level there was some sort of resentment of the Americans' becoming top dog, which was true on the left as well the right. For the Left, they resented it because America now stood absolutely as the opposite to the Soviet Union, and the way the Cold War was polarised meant, if you were on that part of the Left, you put your money as it were either with the Soviet Union or with America. And it took maybe a decade for that to become more nuanced. And, when the New Left arrived, it was still very anti-American, but, if you look in terms of cultures, the whole attack in the early 1950s on a sort of Disneyfication, the attack on American comics, they start to cherish folk music, and they look to people like Pete Seeger. Somehow you have in America such music going back to Woody Guthrie, and not affected by Capitalism. Whereas Capitalist culture was sort of invading Britain, the folk thing becomes very important.

**David:** What were their attitudes towards American musicals, *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific* and so on?

**Colin:** If you read the Unity magazine they weren't as damning as a lot of people. A lot of people enjoyed them.

**David:** That was the point. It was popular entertainment in the immediate aftermath of the war.

**Colin:** And of course a lot of those musicals come out of some of the same sorts of techniques that we find in Brecht. You look at the films, you look at the MGM musical films, and lots of sequences are sort of straight Brechtian sequences. But I think there was basically a contradiction. People probably actually enjoyed them, but then said, 'But this is American culture, we mustn't enjoy it' and at that point we didn't like things that were American. And the overriding values of them were very much seen to be supporting the bits of America they didn't like. Of course it was much more complicated than that, because then the next generation came along who liked the pop music, and then you get another twist if you like in the contradictions.

**David:** Rock and roll.

**Colin:** Yes, you still didn't like America, in particular with Vietnam, of course, but you liked the rock music. Dylan in a sense encapsulates some of those problems, going from the folk Dylan, when he was a hero, to do his later material, but even then a lot people still said 'But, yeah, I still like this stuff'. Again, that comes with the commodification of culture, where Dylan happens to be around at a point when he wasn't the first but he was the one who becomes symbolic of this process, manages to be able to cash in on the fact he can get his music sold very broadly. Obviously it's more complicated, but the way in which the record scene changes, the way in which black music starts to change, starts to influence rock and roll for people like Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison and all of those people who in a sense are borrowing from black music. So it all becomes a lot more complicated: you don't like

America because it's fighting in Vietnam, and it's against the things you think you're for, but you like a lot of things that are coming out of America, particularly the energy, just the sheer oomph. You can't underestimate what it was like living in Britain in the 1950s. Very uptight still. This is obviously a vast generalisation, but for a lot of people it was still very conservative.

**David:** A lot of these were ex-soldiers who came home from the war and, in the case of the United States, Eisenhower becomes President. You have a lot of ex-soldiers who are now very regimented and working in business or in private life. It's the idea of conformity and discipline. This sort of thing persists.

**Colin:** It starts to break down in the 1950s, and then, of course, that gathers pace in the 1960s. And what is extraordinary in the 1960s was this sense of the world unravelling, in Britain certainly. Everything is starting to change in terms of the way you saw your elders, your so-called betters, the whole notion, the whole deference thing went, you get the satire movement. It's basically a cultural thing, but it's supported obviously by the fact that the British economy is starting, to not pick up exactly, but to recover from the immediate post-war period. There's a level of comfortable living for enough people for this to become a reality. It's still not the case for a lot of working class people, but, if you like, the post-war sense of wellbeing is sufficiently strong for the 1960s to happen. I don't think it would have happened if it had been a recession because a lot of the things that happened, in terms of what we think of as the 1960s revolution was a sort of middle-class thing.

**David:** Teenagers who had enough money to go to school and to develop their ideas, they aren't forced through necessity to work in factories.

**Colin:** Exactly. I remember when I was at school, because I was born in 1950, so I was 10 in 1960, so my teenage years were with the 1960s. I remember the Beatles starting, the Rolling Stones and all of that. I remember going on strike while I was at school. At the time there was the first national school student organisation, and all this sort of thing. But that's because at that point it never, never crossed my mind I wouldn't have a job, or that life would in some way be awful for me. Just didn't, wasn't in my consciousness.

**David:** I just rented *Tom Jones*, the screenplay was written by John Osborne. George Devine is in it.

**Colin:** The film, yes.

**David:** I rented it for entertainment, but it was revealing about this period, 1963.

**Colin:** If you're interested, there's a wonderful film that just came out on DVD called *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment*, written by David Mercer, a film by Karel Reisz, which really sums up the sense of individual freedom then.

**David:** Cocking a snoot at the class system and traditional values.

**Colin:** And this is also a period where a lot of bright working class kids went to grammar schools and were educated, if you like, out of their background, in particular ones in the north who came possibly from either factory or mining backgrounds. Then they said I'm not going to go back to that. So they then came down south, did jobs in the media or whatever, and

there are a lot of plays about this: they actually became deracinated. So, what are their roots? Okay, so they've escaped the factory and the pit, but to what? And Mercer's a key writer in that, as is David Storey; there are many of them. So, we're coming to the next generation, which is my generation, who had this ambiguity about America. I was brought up to think that America was the country that came into the war late twice. That was the way my Dad taught me, y'know. He was a Conservative, but that was my sort of upbringing. But I listened to American music and, when I first went to New York, I was just astonished at the sense of liberation compared to what I'd seen in London. So, you've got a mix, a real change if you like. It was a bit like what was happening in the 1930s, where the energy that came through the writing of people like Odets and Shaw, which is bold and muscular, was completely different to anything being written in England. There were no writers in England at that point. Ian Brown has mentioned Joe Corrie's work in Scotland, but he's writing a different sort of play, very powerful but completely different. There is a directness about American writing, a sort of muscularity, a very strong emotional quality. This is why you find Williams and Miller become interesting after the war, because the British are still writing like Rattigan. He writes fantastically and about similar things but you have to read it so carefully because it's so buried.

**David:** Well, it's written with the censorship in mind, whereas these American plays, and I want to ask you about this. During the 1950s and 1960s you have a number US playwrights, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller or Edward Albee emerge, and there are these highly visible Pulitzer prize-winning productions, like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf*. And these plays were not written with the British censor in mind. But there was interest in producing these plays in Britain. So I'm curious if this situation put pressure in some way at some level on the system of censorship in Britain.

**Colin:** Oh yes, because a campaign against censorship didn't really warm up until the 1960s, but people used to circumvent it by setting up club theatres. Unity was a club theatre. But in 1956 or 1955, I can't remember, New Watergate was set up to do plays which had gay themes, which were American plays. And so, although that was part of a campaign against censorship, the fact that this had to be done – it was done in the West End where they took over the Comedy Theatre in the West End – was in a way an affront to the cultural set-up. Why do we have to have this weird situation, where to do these plays, which are about something that's illegal as well – because at that point it was illegal – so they're there in the background but they don't actively play a part in the campaign? But that's in a sense because they're not written by people who are British. Whereas, the big campaign got going in the 1960s through the Royal Court, and centred – not exclusively, but a lot – around the theatre.

**David:** But the day after the Theatres Act of 1968 went into the statute books *Hair: American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* opens.

**Colin:** Yeah. We've talked about the impact of the whole idea of the studio theatre movement. For example, the Royal Court opening the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs is actually a response to Off Off Broadway. It wasn't that people didn't do stuff in studios before, but the idea that now everybody had to have another small space, was really the impact of Off Off Broadway. And you can't overestimate the impact of the Living Theatre, the impact of Chaikin coming over. *America Hurrah* was a big show. Groups like Bread and Puppet Theatre coming over and, of course, the Americans who were working here...

**David:** Is this what influences Buzz Goodbody in the establishment of the Warehouse and the Other Place? This was the La MaMa warehouse...

**Colin:** Absolutely. Because when the RSC, for example, went to Brooklyn, I went with them in 1971 or 1972. I can't remember, whichever year it was. And they were doing workshops with Ellen Stewart. They went to La MaMa. That's where they went. Brook was there. Brook had just done *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and they were taking *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the Brooklyn Academy of Music. But what they wanted to do was to go and work at La MaMa, and that's where I met Paul Foster and Robert Patrick and I brought back some plays from that trip, one of which was *Kennedy's Children*, which became in its own small way, sort of iconic of that period. It was done first in Glasgow then in London, and it became very famous at the time, as a sort of zeitgeist play, if you like. Roland Rees went over and came back with Ed Bullins's plays, that beginning the latest manifestation of black theatre which led to the formation of several black theatre groups. So the American influence was all over, so that Buzz might not have thought of it consciously in that way, but there is no question that was the milieu in which you went and opened a studio theatre and you did it yourself.

**David:** She also worked at the Open Space, Marowitz's theatre.

**Colin:** Exactly. And Walter Donohue, who also happens to be American and was the literary manager at the Warehouse, worked with Marowitz, and directed. Now the idea that you could do this would be absolutely impossible at somewhere like the RSC, that you could open another theatre, take a tin hut and get a group of actors, and designers and whatever – anybody who wanted to come in over a weekend – paint it and do all that and throw it up, DIY-type stuff. It wouldn't be allowed now, but anyway people wouldn't even think of it. The reason people did it then, I believe, was because the influence of Off Off Broadway.

**David:** Marowitz is a figure who is really at the heart of that. In Greenwich Village he had his own Method company in New York. And then he came to Britain in 1956 and Peter Brook was interested in Method techniques, and brought him on board for the experimental group. And the idea, as I understand it, was to develop these techniques, put Artaud's theories into practice within a context of the experimental group and then incorporate some of the actors and these techniques into the larger company. I'm just curious if that had a long-term impact or if it's possible to identify that? Or is it short-term?

**Colin:** It is short-term. Because Brook always had a problem with English actors and felt they weren't trained properly. And he wanted to transform all that but realised that actually he couldn't. It's not a one-man thing; it's not possible. He went, or people asked him to go, to the RSC and that seemed to him a good place to try it out, and he probably got as far as any one individual could get but he always worked very much within his own little group. And so he never really affected the whole company, other than by example, which is clearly very important. And, you know, in the direct sense, I mean he never actually directed *The Screens*. His original impulse for doing the Theatre of Cruelty was to do *The Screens* by Jean Genet. This, the censor – we're back to the censor - the censor wouldn't allow. They actually did, as you know, they did *The Screens* and they...

**David:** He was seriously considering establishing the RSC experimental group in Paris and of course he lives and works there now.

**Colin:** Of course, he's done *Sergeant Musgrave's* in Paris. I mean, that's another important aspect of Brook – is that he's not English. I mean, he's English in one sense, but his sensibility is cosmopolitan, international. He's as at home in Paris as he is in New York or London or wherever.

**David:** Marowitz has a criticism of him. He says that he expropriates techniques from others: like in the famous *Midsummer Night's Dream* he's using Meyerhold's techniques, whereas he used Marowitz's techniques or Artaud or Grotowski and so on – that he borrows from others.

**Colin:** Absolutely. He's a complete magpie. He's quite open about it, though. If you read what he says, for example, about the *King Lear* rehearsal. He says my only principle was to use what was useful, to go through a process where I just got rid of everything that wasn't useful. So he borrows, he borrows from Noh theatre; there's a whole Eastern influence. He had his own philosophical bent towards Eastern spiritual ideas. He brought in Grotowski, then got rid of Grotowski. The *Mahabharata* has been majorly criticised, particularly by black and Asian scholars and theatre practitioners, for the way he borrowed in the *Mahabharata*. So the idea of it's a supermarket where you've got, oh there's a bit of Asian culture on the top shelf, a bit of Caribbean culture...

**David:** Well, it's a holy book to the Hindus, playing it on stage is a touchy thing to...

**Colin:** Absolutely. But there's no relationship with its culture. He just takes; that's what they say. What's he giving back? He doesn't live there; he doesn't understand it. He just sees something and borrows it. And in a sense that's almost a paradigm of the times. So, we'll come back to the question. Because Brook always operated like that, it never actually, it wasn't something he systematically helped to pervade the whole company. He did his project, and then he moved on. The closest he got was doing *Marat/Sade* and *US* in the main theatre at the Aldwych. But as soon as that went, once he'd gone from that, when he came back to do *Midsummer Night's Dream* it's as if he hadn't done all that work. That gap meant that, for the RSC, it wasn't in any way transformed by whatever it was, Artaud or Grotowski or improvisation, although by that time improvisation had sort of become everyday. It had been accepted in a way that it hadn't been ten years before.

**David:** But there was an interest about American plays. There were three Edward Albee productions, and these other productions. Would this be seen as a phase? Was it when Peter Hall became interested?

**Colin:** It was actually a lot to do with David Jones, who sadly is dead. I wish you could talk to David. David was the man in charge of the Aldwych theatre and its repertoire and, if you look at the repertoire of the Aldwych under David, it's again very internationalist.

**David:** That's where the World Theatre Seasons took place.

**Colin:** Yes, that actually predated David but he was very happy to, as it were, inherit when he took over the Aldwych. Trevor Nunn had decided that the Aldwych needed a guiding voice, a guiding intelligence. And that was where he did all the Gorky plays. Also Gunter Grass was done. But it was a very contemporary modern feel.

**David:** Why was there interest in this particular five-year period in doing the Edward Albee plays, and the other American plays?

**Colin:** David was interested, and Peter Hall, but I can't give you an exact answer as to why at that moment it may have been. I have to check dates.

**David:** It was 1969, 1974.

**Colin:** I was thinking of the dates of Ronald Bryden. Ron Bryden was the literary manager of the RSC. I think he was the literary manager during this period. And Ron had been the *Observer* theatre critic, and he would have been an important ally with David in terms of where the repertoire came from. Certainly he was interested in American theatre, because he was the person, I'm pretty sure though I need to check this, who found the Sherlock Holmes play by William Gillette, an American play.

**David:** Was it an artistic interest, or was it commercial or balancing both? Edward Albee had *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. That was a sellable commodity.

**Colin:** Yeah, well, the Albee plays were anything but commercial. I saw them. They were interesting, but in no way would anyone have thought they would do what *Virginia Woolf* had done.

**David:** He also came out of the Off Off Broadway movement, and Caffé Cino. Edward Albee was there before he was prominent. He was right in the middle of all that.

**Colin:** Yes, something like the Jules Feiffer is an interest. That gives you the taste: Feiffer not known as a writer but as a cartoonist. So it's slightly quirky.

**David:** And Saroyan also.

**Colin:** Yeah.

**David:** *The Time of Your Life*

**Colin:** Yes, that was one that I found actually. That's a bit later. That was one that I suggested to Howard Davies, for a production actually, very good. Let me think a bit more about why at that moment they chose... see Arthur Kopit, there was Kopit, there was Feiffer, there was Albee. Let me think a bit more about, because there might be – I need to check whether it's worth reading – value in sending you to read the RSC magazine of that period, to see what they were saying about it. Because that might give you a clue as to why they chose those plays. I can give you the details. I need to check when the magazine finished as well, because it didn't last all that long. But just to see if it covers that period, the latest stuff, because they were doing all on the main stage at the Aldwych. That's big, you know: you're talking about a major West End theatre situation. Whereas *The Time of Your Life* is a small theatre, and all this stuff later was in really in one of the studio spaces. Like Naomi Wallace plays, the Sam Shepard plays we revived, which we did.

**David:** Marowitz introduced Sam Shepard to the British theatre, and Shepard also was part of this Off Off Broadway scene. I'm curious. We've talked a little bit about the idea of dialectical theatre. Is there any credibility to this idea that the alternative theatre movement



created a dialectical relationship with the commercial West End establishment, and that this created, over time, a greater level of engagement with British society? That somehow this tension between the alternative theatre and the commercial West End theatre opened up the theatrical landscape?

**Colin:** I think that unlike in the 1930s, or even later with Unity, the alternative theatre in the later period, although it was separate, was also much more a part of the overall culture of the time, the country. So, for example, if you bought your copy of *Time Out*, somebody might look to go and see something at the Open Space, but they might also look to go and see something in the West End. They were, if you like, different offerings, but in the same sort of menu, if that makes sense. Whereas Unity was actually saying we're not in the same restaurant; it's a different menu; our menu's a different menu.

**David:** Is there, although it's very theoretical, any credibility to the idea that that created a dialectical relationship with the...

**Colin:** It's interesting. I mean in that sense people like Buzz Goodbody were actually engaged. It wasn't commercial theatre, but, in so far as the RSC represented something mainstream, that was taking the alternative idea into the mainstream very clearly. That was conscious, and the people she recruited came from the alternative theatre. It was conscious on the part of Trevor Nunn to ask her to do that. So in that sense that represents a certain dialectical process. In terms of the commercial theatre, it is slightly harder. It becomes important because the commercial theatre actually only survives through the subsidised theatre and, if you look at where the artists of a certain period come from, it's the subsidised theatre. And the subsidised theatre included the alternative theatre.

**David:** Do you think it is possible to now go to a West End commercial theatre and see trends and examples of theatre practice that can be traced back through the alternative theatre, experimental theatre?

**Colin:** Yes. I mean the best example is probably looking at something like Trevor Nunn and John Caird's production *Nicholas Nickleby*. The techniques that *Nicholas Nickleby* used had all been done on the fringe years beforehand.

**David:** It was a comment on Thatcher. It was 1982, and so on.

**Colin:** Yeah, and then it was exactly that. Trevor and John...

**David:** They would talk about traditional values and so on and this was a way of reminding the public, of reminding the audience of what the Victorian period was actually like. It's not a romanticised version.

**Colin:** And then that became an enormous hit, and it also in terms of stagecraft became a sort of benchmark for commercial productions afterwards. And of course Trevor himself went into the commercial theatre and became one of the most successful commercial directors, more or less using the stuff he used in *Nicholas Nickleby*. I mean always any show you see of Trevor's, *Nicholas Nickleby* lies behind it. So, I think that the route was through the subsidised theatre, which of course didn't exist when Unity was around. So that's the big difference.

**David:** It started during the war with the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts and ENSA and ...

**Colin:** It becomes mainly important from the 1960s on, and of course the alternative theatre movement fought to get public subsidy as a right, although they were anti-establishment. Again, it's a whole other issue about the rights and wrongs of that, but they believed that, if public money was going to culture, it should go to people representing their point of view, as well as to the people, as it were, who were supporting the status quo. So a lot of the arguments are about why should the State pay people to attack the State, and all that sort of stuff.

**David:** Well, dissent is a part of a healthy democracy.

**Colin:** But then, of course, other people would say that that's then the State buying off the dissent. Those arguments will go on. But I think there is a very clear relationship between what the alternative theatre did and the survival of the commercial theatre. It comes through the subsidised theatre. The National and the RSC are very very important in sustaining the commercial theatre, in the end. The menu that people work to, it's slightly changing now, but certainly in the 1980s and 1990s, you could look at all the names that came through. Well, although that's another story, look at it in terms of cinema now: Danny Boyle, Roger Michell, Sam Mendes, these are all people from the subsidised sector.

**David:** David Hare won the Oscar for Best Screenplay a couple of years ago?

**Colin:** Yes. Anyway, there's a real relationship and certainly the energy of Off Off Broadway was really important in just unleashing a lot of other things. They then went off in their own direction, but that was a really almost like a time-bomb.

**David:** I've heard Brecht and the *Verfremdung* technique described as a kind of grain of sand, as in an oyster, and it irritates and it's not in itself an overriding theory, it's just an irritant that provokes other things to happen.

**Colin:** Although in the 1960s and 1970s, some of it was a lot more conscious than that. Marowitz was consciously trying to do that. You know, Haynes, the people we are talking about, Ed Berman, they were all absolutely trying to say, 'Come on you Brits, wake up, there's a better way of doing stuff'. What then happened was less conscious, but they were absolutely saying, 'Come on we're going to shake them, get some life in this bloody corpse. You call yourself a great theatre nation, well come on.' And I remember seeing, not only things like *America Hurrah* and the Living Theatre and all that, but the World Theatre Season, and going 'Wow, is that what they do in wherever'.

**David:** What was the genesis of the World Theatre Season?

**Colin:** A guy called Peter Daubeny, who was a producer, as opposed to a director, and he'd been bringing shows over here. It's sort of in a way borrowing from the Edinburgh Festival. Peter brought stuff over in the 1950s and then did a deal with Peter Hall to use the Aldwych. The way the RSC was structured, they had a gap and it suited them to have these companies. They wanted to do exchanges themselves, because Peter Hall wanted the RSC to be seen as one of the great companies like the Berliner Ensemble, like the Moscow Art Theatre. like the Comédie Française. So he wanted to exchange, he wanted to go out there and so it was part of

that idea. The Foreign Office would often block the visits of the Berliner for political reasons, but it got the Moscow Art Theatre in. So, there was this, and the Actors' Studio came over, so it was set as part of Peter Hall's vision of making British culture much more responsive to other influences, but also to say 'We're part of that. We're not just responding. This is our world. Do you know what it's like?' I was talking about England being very insular, which it is. If you happen to go to mainland Europe, talking to theatre people, there's a much stronger sense that they're part of a network which isn't to do with the boundaries. So, if you're in Paris, they'll be talking about what is happening in Prague or Berlin or... Here in London, you just talk about what's happening here in London. And Hall, who had been to Germany to do his National Service, was part of a generation wanting to look outwards. He married Leslie Caron, a French actress so... People like Brook who had this much more multicultural view wanted to reposition British culture and so that was not specifically to do with America but to do with breaking the isolation of Britain. And in terms of the big acting companies, of course they were in contact with Europe, and Brook took his production of *Hamlet* to... I think it was the first British company to go to the Soviet Union with *Hamlet* in 1956, 1957 or something like that. And then of course, *King Lear* and *The Comedy of Errors* went around all those Eastern and Central European countries, and they were fantastically well received in Yugoslavia, in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and Moscow. So, they were making these connections to the world. It was just a natural part of all of that. But this one guy, Peter Daubeny, that's what he liked doing: he liked bringing these companies over, and that had a great effect as well. It's such a big, complex field, but, within that, there are very specific American influences and that's what you've got to try and home in on.

**David:** Great. Thank you Professor Chambers.

## Appendix Three

### Richard Demarco Interview

Also present Ben Harman, Director, Stills Gallery, Edinburgh.

9 May 2011

#### Demarco Archive, Edinburgh

**Richard:** I'll tell you, this country is the only country. I mean, we're living in a very strange country. I have, I don't know why, or how it came to be, but when I was at school, aged 17, already suffering greatly from anti-Catholic and anti-Italian bigotry, I mean I was beaten up.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** Because I was Italian.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** There were little Pakistanis around, who followed us. Soldiers weren't exactly welcome. The fact is, I remember, that this happened in the baths, you know the shower. It was pure Hitchcock.

There was this little boy, aged, whatever, 10. Little fellow. There were these thugs, something like four or five, that came into the shower where I was. All I could remember was the blood running down my face, the punches. I was there lying on the floor in my own blood, in the shower. Pure Hitchcock. Great stuff.

Walking on the promenade, in Portobello to get to the baths, I'd find groups of youths throwing stones. Then going to school, I would find that I had to be escorted by the police holding the hands of the little child who is my age. This is all Anglo-Protestant action for the war, right?

My whole thing is, knowing that the last thing you want to be in Scotland in this white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant country is, first of all, living in a... What would you call it, a ghetto. A Catholic, no, an Italian ghetto inside a Catholic ghetto, two ghettos. Pretty interesting.

You don't even have to be called Weinberg, you just have to be called Demarco. And you weren't allowed to speak Italian.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** They were talking about changing the name, anglicising it.

**David:** Even at home you couldn't speak Italian?

**Richard:** No, you couldn't. As a child, it was not a good idea. You could endanger yourself.

**Jackie:** They were protecting you.

**David:** You were in an internment camp.

**Richard:** Well, the Italians suffered grievously. They were poor little pathetic peasants, who were not intellectuals. They had no one in higher places to protect them. When the Arandora Star was torpedoed... This is all part of the why would I follow the ...

Why would I spend all my time a schoolteacher in a Christian Brothers school, and all my spare time, every minute, for nothing?

**David:** So, to some degree, was your art fuelled by discontent with what art was...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I was taught I was born to be a European. Everything about me was European and it was not acceptable in the war to liberate Europe.

You understand that the context of my life, born in 1930, you're born a victim. I had to see it coming when my father would take me to a newsreel, Italian newsreel and the kids all around me were dressed in black shirts and they were singing "Giovanezza la ri la"<sup>1</sup> and they needed some kind of sense of self-respect.

The fact is that all innocent, and I remember saying to my father, when I saw this Italian movie on news. This guys dressed in white sheets on horseback, I said "So pretty, they try to fight against these airplanes and these tanks".

The Italian army occupied Abyssinia so I said to my father, with the wisdom of a child, I said "This is not a good idea. That is not good for us." He said "No, it's not...but the future doesn't seem to be their having one. Don't worry."

I knew that the Spanish Civil War was a trial run and blitzkrieg was a new kind of warfare. I knew that when the war came, I could feel it was inevitable. Within a year it practically would make the biggest mistake under Mussolini, and go to war.

All this is going on, in this mind, in this soul. I'm also marked by the fact that I went to Holy Cross Academy. What about that for an embarrassing name? Holy Cross Academy? "Accademia della Santa Croce".

Unthinkable. Even if you admit and you're wearing your school jacket, a cross,<sup>2</sup> and it says "Santa Croce è nostra speranza" -- The Cross is our hope -- which I still believe there is a case, but I remember thinking that this is a whole thing where, even if I weren't Italian or I looked Italian, a part of a second division, a second rate social structure here.

I remember at art college that was still the case that I was defined as an "Eye-tie" or "wop". The generations after this were not affected. My father...

**Ben:** I know very well what you are talking about, because I did that rude one-liners where I was surprised about the extent of bigotry.

[crosstalk]

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to the Italian fascist anthem:  
'Giovanezza, Giovanezza,  
Prima vera di bellezza.'

<sup>2</sup> Reference to school badge.

**Richard:** The reason of why I spent my life, the reason of a situation of a past time in the history of a good essentially, using art as a means of healing the wounds of war. That's what I did.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I told you, I'm the only guy that you are going to meet who has been to every single festival. I haven't been to every single festival because I am not someone who is a -- what's the word? -- A bit of an audience. I do not think it right and proper for someone to -- what's the word -- to eat off the great table of the artists. You can sit around with people and you enjoy the unbelievable luxuriant food.

Early on, when I'm 17 I was obliged to go with my class of fourth formers or whatever, to see a play. In those days, school children -- this should be the case now - are obliged to go to the festival. In those days, the major productions were liable to be in foreign language.

I loved the idea of the festival when I was told about my father it will be dedicated to the music of Germany. All about her, contacting the "Vienna Symphony Philharmonic".

1947. Three years before, I'm not going to time, should be, close the doors of the last -- what do you call it? Ghetto in [foreign words] . I have been given the freedom of [foreign words] because I crossed [foreign words] 97 times. I'm not in the world of theatre. It could be a great success in the world of theatre without going across to [foreign words] across the Iron Curtain.

I must tell you that whenever I found a cover for myself, was my natural inheritance, as a European. I wanted to make cover the one thing that for example, Americans still don't have, which is "The full bloodied inheritance of the genius of European thinking" that Christo-Judaic dynamic.

I'm not talking about the Jews or the Christians, I'm talking about the 6,000 years of history of the Jews. You can't separate the world of a Jew and the world of a Christian. It's together.

I abhor the concept of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, because they're using the wrong language. They are not speaking Latin or the language of the Jews.

What I'm saying if you could hold this together, this is why I'm still battling to have my archive properly positioned and why, when I went to Kingston University, I decided not to be in the School of Visual Art.

I was professor of "European Cultural Studies". I wanted to feel that everybody would see clearly, that we all are entitled to the full-blown unbelievable truth, in parties being the Christian-Judaic and Greco-Roman history.

What happened was, that I saw in that one moment of truth.

[background talk]

**Richard:** The great music of Europe. I'd never heard Beethoven. How can a little boy in Edinburgh hear a great orchestra? It's not on.

I soon discovered, of course, that the guy who founded it was an Austrian Jew brought up in Berlin, Rudolf Bing. He together with Tyrone Guthrie, the great director, always obliged Edinburgh to have the festival. The festival was rejected of course, naturally.

I used to think that this city was maybe 50 per cent resistant to culture. It doesn't have an opera house, it didn't have a gallery of modern art, it didn't have any galleries which were selling inter...All they sold was Scottish art, OK?

**David:** Was the idea for the Traverse and the Edinburgh Gateway to create a permanent home for the work that was happening during the Edinburgh festival?

**Richard:** You just hit it. Every festival up until, let's see, 1957, when I happened to meet a guy called Jim Haynes, who was working for American air force in a radar station, defending us from the horror of the Russians.

He and I met in 1957 at a play called "Corruption in the Palace of Justice" by Ugo Betti. What? I wanted to know more about this guy Ugo Betti who could write a play that no Scot was going to write.

What happened, it took six years from that first meeting to 1963, 2nd January or the 3rd January, I think it's the 2nd, when the Traverse doors opened.

The guy who opened the festival, sorry, the Traverse, was me. Jim wasn't there. Jim was somewhere else...

[crosstalk]

**David:** ...Visiting his parents...

**Richard:** ...His parents or whatever he was doing.

It was typical [laughs], he wouldn't be there at the very moment when it either was going to collapse on the first night. Of course, the second night, there was the unhappy situation where one actress stabbed the other by accident. Other than that she was going to bleed nearly to death.

The building we were in was a crap, a horrible, disgusting cellar, a manure floor. It was an odd theatre. That's why no one in the theatre world in Scotland wanted to go anywhere near it, so I knew I couldn't get support from the theatre world.

**David:** It's a lot like some of the early off-Broadway theatres in Greenwich Village.

**Richard:** Wait a minute, you've just hit again. I don't understand, David, how you are...

How you understand these things. Nobody understands it, because this city's full of people, educated at Watson's and Heriot's,<sup>3</sup> who are not encouraged to concentrate on European thinking.

It's the British Empire. That's why. So it would be able to produce lawyers, doctors, officials, missionaries to spread the whole belief.

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<sup>3</sup> George Watson's College and George Heriot's School were semi-private (now entirely private) Edinburgh schools with largely middle-class pupils.

Therefore, you must understand that where you are now is not an art gallery. This is the Traverse Theatre you're in. You are in it. Before you even go further, you should also note that it all began with Jim.

Eventually, I said to him, "You can't go back to America." I went to America to see his world in New Orleans. I got the shock of my life. I got off the train, "Chattanooga choo choo"...

[crosstalk]

"Chattanooga choo choo, "Track 29", "Can you spare me a dime". "Dinner in a diner, nothing could be finer, like to have your ham and eggs in Carolina."<sup>4</sup>

Arriving, making a mistake of making a phone call to his friends where I would be staying, and not realising, I said, oh, that's interesting, everybody here is black.

Every single 13 telephone kiosks all black people using them. I made the phone call and I came out looked to the other side of the station, same wall of telephone boxes, and they were all being used by white people. I had entered into the ultimate bigotry, an absolutely detestable, disgusting, unbelievable, 20th century rubbish heap, the American way of life.

I said to Jim, "You can't live in a place like this. You can't possibly." This was before Martin Luther King and all that was just waiting for it.

He came back after his denouement. You must see the importance of...

**Jackie:** Those are various different things that mention the Traverse.

**Ben:** They talk about the Traverse and your career...

[crosstalk]

**Jackie:** ...All the stuff in those boxes and a box of other stuff...

[papers rustling]

**Richard:** ...Now Jackie if you could continue...Any of the programs, darling?

**Jackie:** I've gone through everything in those boxes.

**Richard:** Right. Could I point out, I am not in the bloody stupid world of art which is now the world of entertainment.

**Ben:** How do you, what do you see yourself, when you say you're in the theatre, why do you see yourself, what do you see...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...Answering the problems of the art gallery space?

**Richard:** I mean he worked for me, the guy that founded that. I did present Damien Hirst. I believe that was the white cube.

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<sup>4</sup> Quoting a Glenn Miller song.



**Ben:** What?

**Richard:** In the one theatre space I knew he needed to deal with, which was Barlinnie Prison, inside the special unit. I said, "Your audience are six murderers, the same thing as Calvary." I'm doing the same thing.

I wouldn't be able to do it if I'd been brought up in a Protestant school. In a Protestant school, you'll never see an image of a figure of Christ on the cross. You won't get the whole story of Herod and the Roman occupation, and the whole political structure where Herod says, "Well, it's not really me."

"No," the Roman guy says. "I don't want to take this decision, it's too much. You guys do it." Then you get the mob, which is always usually wrong. They do things for the wrong reason.

What I'm trying to say is, the stations of my cross in my church at Portobello were beautiful. I saw the whole story.

**Ben:** Concerning the important thing, frankly I'm not a theatre scholar or a Protestant person to engage you with this, but I mean, the important thing about theatre is hardly a Christian tradition...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** ...No, but you've got it...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...A democratic...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...In fact, the European Christian Judaic tradition that you're talking about, is David will have an opinion of this for sure but it's probably the [laughs] low point.

**Richard:** Art is the language I use. It's the language of love, and the language of healing. Can I tell you...? The number one artist that I... Two of the greatest artists ever in the history of art were Beuys and Kantor.

Beuys. I'm giving all my artwork...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...Catholics...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** ...Well no, one was Jewish, not catholic...

**David:** The Baroque emerged from the counter-reformation, right?

**Richard:** That's right.

**David:** It's very kind of theatrical, and very...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** ...It produced what we call modern opera and everything else.

No. You know all this, you are just the gallery director. I get this despised, look at you, what are you in theatre? You get that look from the politicians.

**Ben:** The art world in general, across the board without exception, I think the art world is incredibly parochial about us thinking about culture.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** The problem with the argument that you're making Richard, about art and love I accept of course, the history that you're talking about and things like the Edinburgh festival, the sort of moment of reconciliation after the war and all the rest of it.

Other things were going on during the war that were very important, for example, CEMA during the war. Do you remember CEMA ?

**Richard:** Yeah.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** That was a sort of cultural democracy because the government state needed that type of social contract with culture, with the working classes. We're all at war together, we'll have a democracy [laughs] to a degree. After the war, things changed very rapidly.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...The art world, including the theatre world including the arts as well it should very probably were part of a contract. An entire book I was reading and writing about this recently, they forged a contract with the state at the expense of...

**Richard:** Can I tell you that brings in Jenny Lee, OK and Bevan. Jenny Lee...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...Does ...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** ...Can I tell you who I had to depend on, but I also knew they were my enemy. I knew the whole thing would be handed over to the state. The state is never, never the body. They should be dealing directly with artists. Never. Because it's faceless.

One of the most important things is, life is full of ambiguity and madness. I have to point out to you that the Traverse existed in my mind for four years. None of the people running it were paid. It was all done for love, for love of the truth.

Where did it come from? It didn't come from theatre, it came from literature. The two greatest things that happened before it actually opened its doors, but which had to happen, were the book festival - sorry, the Writer's Conference -- and the Playwright's Conference. That's where I met Mailer, J B Priestley and Lillian Hellman. Eventually that led to the great moment.

I'm going to have to write all this down. I imagine I should be able to talk about all this. I should come down and speak about this at Kingston.

**David:** We can make arrangements for that.

**Richard:** Can you do that?

**David:** Sure.

**Richard:** Right. Can I tell you? This is very important.

John Calder was the great friend and publisher of Beckett. Beckett's plays are all about an agnostic view. Of course Calder was educated as a Catholic, so his sins are Catholic, which means they're purple.

Protestant's sins are greenish, sort of, you don't bother with them. There's no point in having confession because you're not allowed to commit sins in the Protestant religion. The Catholic religion almost encourages you. I mean the great sinners are all Catholics. But the fact is...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...They had style...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** ...No, there's nothing, because you've given a scenario you're bound to feel.

What interests me is that only the language of theatre and all aspects of the arts will enable you to become fully human. I don't believe -- now that I am heading on my 81st birthday -- there will ever be a scientific endeavour which will be the answer to everything.

Telling you that the universe is exploding, imploding, exploding, telling you that the DNA will tell us exactly everything there is to know about the human soul or mind.

No, I know that the artist, the great artists like Beckett, like Joyce, like Kantor, like, let me think, Bruno Schultz, who ended up shot because he was a Jew. Why do I love Poland? It is the great melting pot where Christianity and the Jewish soul come together.

There is a graveyard with nearly 400,000 Jewish graves. We cannot even contemplate that. We do not know what it looks like. The pits ready to be filled with more bodies with the Germans ready to shoot people digging the pits. Then at that moment the new scouts, the Russians [laughs] are approaching and they run away.

You still see the pits not covered in and you can meet either the descendants or the original survivors. Now in a situation like that, knowing that the last ghetto closed its doors in August 1944.

I mean I am 13 at one point. Sorry, 11 at one point or 14 or whatever and then the next minute I am 17 and the Festival comes in to being on the basis that we have to forget the Germans. The whole thing is about Germany. They add to it the glorious angelic voice of the

...

Now you don't know these facts. You don't know about the great miracle happened. Why therefore do you think that I found myself inviting Ellen Stewart the founder of Off-Off Broadway who died the other day? I've just read her obituary.

She came to me as a real outsider, West Indian sort of, American, new hope, Chicago. Doing the whole thing on her earnings as an out.

I mean the whole thing. The gallery was born out of my school salary of £1,600 a year and in the sale of my paintings. This whole place is run on that even now. I am not employed. I don't get a pension. I get nothing.

I want you to know it was the same with Ellen Stewart. I said to her when the Demarco Gallery was born. I said, "I am very worried. We've been in existence two months. I personally I am afraid I can't see a future."

I didn't know we would exist for nearly 60 years. I didn't know that. She looked at me she said, "Listen, kid."

She was older than me. I didn't know if she was 16 or 60. I could never tell.

She said, "You're going to survive. Just like La MaMa will survive because this place has got a lot of love in it." [laughs]

I'll never forget that. She said, "That's all you need to know."

There is no love in the manufactured state-run theatres. There is no love in the state theatres of Poland and why did I not choose Grotowski? I mean 1970's somethings. I said no to Grotowski and they were off it like the devil. Everything, Communist government because he was their favourite person. I chose...Oh my god you haven't got that?

**Jackie:** Elizabeth Blackadder?

**Richard:** Yeah, that is a print by John Houston

**Jackie:** Are you sure?

**Richard:** He printed it.

**Jackie:** It says Blackadder.

**Richard:** From Elizabeth Blackadder. Sorry I got it wrong. The wife of John Houston.

**Jackie:** Oh, she is the wife of John Houston.

**Richard:** The widow. Anyway, get this.

**David:** Who died?

**Richard:** Yeah, he died the other day. About two months ago, three months ago. I went to college with him.

**David:** I remember you telling me so.

**Richard:** A very interesting footballer from East Five. I travelled to Glasgow via Falkirk with 16-year-old Elizabeth Blackadder. They couldn't possibly, the two of them understand this human being that I was because I was never going to get a job.

**David:** At your high school?

**Richard:** I did, but then they protested. The people over there said if he remains here we are striking. The head of the School of Design had to get rid of me because I was teaching a class of four. It was merely for the job. After two months, there was 17 students. They were all day students. They were all listening to my theories of art, which were not, the...

**David:** Was this Edinburgh College of Art?

**Richard:** Edinburgh College of Art and that was the moment when I was told you've had it. I decided I will go for the idea of this theatre because I was the one that was invited to run it by the guy who owned the building, Tom Mitchell.

**Man:** How did you meet Tom Mitchell?

**Richard:** This is the real story. Not possible for somebody like Joyce McMillan to know anything about it. John Martin brought all these girlfriends to the house that I lived in Frederick Street with my wife.

In my kitchen, you'd get all the great thinkers, the poets would all end up 29 Frederick Street. 29 Frederick Street was where the Traverse was born. It was created through the concept of a salon.

You either met there or you met in the Paper Back . Now the Paper Back Bookshop was where John Calder decided he could show all his publications. No else wanted them.

It was a paperback Marguerite Duras. Who the hell wanted to read that?

It was in a street, which is now demolished of course. Right next to the University Union. All the lecturers thought, "Oh yes."

The great advantage I had then because I couldn't go out on the Scots or the Scottish establishment. There was no evidence of the festival. 49 weeks of the year, it was like the festival never existed. Do you understand that? There was never ...

**Ben:** It's still like that.

**Richard:** No, it was except for the story of the Traverse. Now the Traverse is run on the basis - I don't want to guess - several million, something like that.

**Ben:** I don't know.

**Richard:** Everyone's paid and they all get holidays, they get insurance

**Ben:** I assumed would solve of all our problems. Like the Thames is a big money guzzling machine.

**Richard:** Now we get nothing. The only reason why the big, big moment of truth, which is important for you to understand. You above everybody because you're the nearest thing

to...your whole background, your whole story brings you close to who I am. That's why it's important for you to understand what I am trying to run here. I am not running a gallery.

I am working with people who are concerned with the image of Pasolini. Italy doesn't want to be represented by Pasolini.

**Ben:** They want Alberto ...

**Richard:** Certainly not. [laughs] What I am getting at here...

**Ben:** He's Catholic.

**Richard:** I have really got to kid you. Pasolini is one of the greatest sinners in terms of the world, but what a man when he could make a film on the life of Saint Francis, which I could take very seriously.

I want you to know that one of the great forces in my life is Ellen Stewart. When she taught me that across my table, people think bloody Traverse was founded on something else other than love.

What happened after the four years? Two things went bonkers. He is basically a lovely man. He doesn't like working too hard and he certainly doesn't like reading plays. He has an old friend named Jack Harry Moore. Old Jack used to read the plays for him and tell him that this is OK and this isn't.

He was a very unlovable little creature. Quite ugly and he was homosexual. Now on these days it was...

**Man:** Illegal.

**Richard:** Pardon?

**Man:** Homosexuality was still illegal in those days.

**Richard:** Members of the committee said, "Well, we don't mind him being [laughs] homosexual and all that, but you made the mistake of becoming..."

**Ben:** It depends on ...

**Richard:** The artistic director instead of being...the whole thing was run - You can't tell the story of the Traverse from the story of the employees. People who were put in place like Gordon MacDougall, any of them.

I was the guy that employed...what's his name? The man who ran the Royal Court?

**Ben:** Max Stafford-Clark.

**Richard:** Max, he was a rugby player and he was a great guy. An intellectual with his mind on really good ideas.

Anyway, the fact is Jim more or less set it up. He said, "I want a general meeting of the Traverse."

There were already 600 members of the club. Who had signed them all up? Me. I had signed them to a theatre that didn't exist saying, "If you don't like it, if it doesn't work, I will give you your money back."

I didn't make any money. That's the risk I took. I meant it because I knew 59th Street Theatre was totally dependent on a few people. In Edinburgh who cared a damn about Beckett or all about any of the great, Pasolini, whatever.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I was cutting my teeth on getting people to turn up, to the feeling audiences to the Scotland's Gateway Theatre.<sup>5</sup> That was pfft. Edinburgh, for god's sake.

A city totally about bourgeois things. It's worse than Boston. I don't know if you ever knew about Boston. Shelley Berman, all these great Jewish commentators doing stand-up comics.

The fact is I remember thinking that first thing blew my mind, but the second thing happened when in 1949 my school went to Paris. I don't know why that happened. It was a miracle.

I saw the Théâtre Marigny production of "Les Ballet des Champs Élysées" with the amazing Jean Babilée and it was the most erotic, unbelievable ballet theatre of Champs Élysées ?

I had just left school, but I was there. I was captain at the school and all that stuff. The headmaster ordered the school to leave at the interval because of its unbearable sensuality, but it was a masterpiece. I remember I said, "I am not leaving. I am not at school. I am an adult and I want to see this."

The Ballet des Champs Élysées, Leslie Caron, age 16 in her first ever role.

What do you think? I came back in despair. My father looked at me and said, "Son, you mustn't be so unhappy. Do you not know?"

"Don't know what?"

He said, "The Empire Theatre is presenting The Ballet des Champs Élysées next month. It is in the festival."

I said, "Oh, my god, I will give Edinburgh a chance."

This is 1949, but before that in 1948 - this is very important for you, I met a big friend of mine, Duncan Macrae. One of the great actors ever to come out of Scotland, now completely forgotten, one of the great, great actors.

By the way, I met his daughter two days ago and she told me "You've got to see my father's archives because his commitment to you is 18." I was 18 when I met him.

He was having coffee in our little café . He said "Come with me, I am going to show you what we're doing."

I said, "What are you doing?"

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<sup>5</sup> Edinburgh's main repertory theatre between 1953 and 1965.

"I'm next door in the Assembly Hall, the meeting place of the Church of Scotland and you should see my drawings that I did. These are my most precious things.

**Ben:** I remember your drawings. Their drawings used to be on every ...

**Richard:** Actually in every house in Edinburgh. My greatest ...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** In every house in Edinburgh.

[laughter]

**Richard:** One of the things that amuses me is I don't blame anybody being completely mystified. Imagine me getting the freedom of a city, which has a cemetery with nearly half a million Jewish souls.

**Ben:** Of course, it tremendously pulls them to this day, tremendously anti-Semitic.

[crosstalk]

**Man:** Concentration camps were in Poland and not ...

**Richard:** I have to tell you. All the great artists. Every one of them was infused with Jewish heart and souls. I can be them all. They were fully aware of this, but also the Polish aristocracy was married...all of them had Jewish blood, as far as I could see. It was very interesting.

Jews were the intellectuals. They were more or less running the country, but what I have got to tell you is, the thrust stage blew my mind. Nobody had ever seen open stage theatre. I did, but I was also the guy who after that job became a receptionist at the Caley Hotel.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I met T.S. Eliot. I met Leslie Caron, Richard Burton, all these people.

**Ben:** They all stayed in the ...

**Richard:** They all came to me because I was a male. In all the great hotels of the world there was a male receptionist. Beside me were all women. They didn't pay any attention to what I was doing, those middle-aged women. I was 19 or 20, but they came to me. I found myself speaking to all of them. I found myself having the most extraordinary conversations with the real festival. That was more important to me.

**Ben:** This was as a receptionist.

**Richard:** ... and I was a fall guy because the hotel had only 11 rooms with private baths.

[crosstalk]

**Man:** Only 11 in that huge hotel?

**Richard:** There were only 24 rooms, but private bathrooms in the whole of Edinburgh. Every single person, I was the one they spoke to. I'd wait for the phone call when they reached the room.

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<sup>6</sup> Nickname of the Caledonian Hotel in Princes Street.



"Hello there, my name is ..." I said "Hello Mr. so and so."

"I can't swing a cat in this room and there is no bathroom."

I said, "Well, there are only 11 bathrooms in the hotel and we don't have any."

"Where is the nearest hotel with bathrooms?"

I said "It's four hours away."

[laughter]

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** Then he goes, "I don't know how I can stay in this goddamn city".

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** That is amazing.

**Richard:** People don't know.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** The back walls are Edinburgh walls.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** First of all, I benefited from the fact that the American Jewish elite were being educated at Vassar, Smiths, the girls, and the world of Mary McCarthy and Yale, Harvard. They were all doing their junior year abroad here. Jim was in love with all the girls and every one of them came to his bookshop. Therefore in the bookshop was the first place.

It was fantastic. The audience was 9 or 10. A tiny room, this size. Downstairs was a gallery.

I found the Traverse because of my friendship with...he bought the whole building and turned it into studio flats and into artist studios.

In 1962, I get a call from a very good friend of mine who was an undergraduate at Cambridge. I am a teacher. That's what I am. I am a teacher. That's what I do. That's why I was teaching at ...

That's why I was working with the man who became the founder of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus.<sup>7</sup> After all, he was the music teacher, I was the art teacher and the kids were unbelievable. They were all very simple, straight forward, Roman Catholic kids who didn't want to go to some place like Watson's. It was a Catholic school.

I remember thinking Arthur that he is a genius. Every boy at that school was taught how to sing. Everyone. Excluding those that don't...

**Ben:** Are tone deaf.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Oldham, founder of Edinburgh Festival Chorus in 1965.

**Richard:** I was able to put on fantastic productions at the school. At the same time, received this phone call, "Hello, Patrick?"

"Yeah, what is it?"

"Are you enjoying Cambridge, your second year?"

"Oh, yeah."

"What's that? You've got a friend called John Cleese?"

"Oh, that's no one."

"He's got a friend called Tim Brooke-Taylor, and there are others."

**Man:** Trevor Nunn was in the group.

**Richard:** That's right.

"What's that? You're going to want to be part of the Cambridge Footlights? You want a space near to the Cambridge Footlights on the Royal Mound? I know what we'll do. I think I've got a room. Yeah, I've got a room. Good. Look, I've got to make a phone call to a friend of mine called Tom Mitchell. [chuckles] Could I...?"

This is how it happened. I've said this, you're the only guy that knows this. You've got to get everybody studying theatre at Kingston to understand the importance of my being at Kingston, and Kingston being unaware of what we have at Kingston. The birth of international avant-garde. OK? Long before the stupid London art world, which was incapable, because the London art world only happens at theatre club. It happened nowhere except West End.

**Ben:** Did avant-garde theatre come to Britain later than other kinds of avant-garde...?

**Richard:** No! No! No! We were two or three months ahead of New York. It was unbelievable. "La MaMa" said, "I can't believe it. You opened the spirit of Off-Off Broadway in Edinburgh three months before we did." [chuckles] I mean, can you imagine? No, it was all these Americans!

**David:** Why was that? Why were there so many Americans?

**Richard:** They were studying junior year abroad. Edinburgh University offered it to them. Edinburgh University is basically run on...it's not collegiate like Oxford and Cambridge, and some other university. The Scottish-Protestant idea of a university, there was no place to bury the faculty. No chapel, no religion...Just like London University, it's the model for American universities. Most of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence were Scots. Scots reigned. What I'm trying to say is...

**Ben:** I'm sorry, but throughout the history of the Traverse there were lots of Americans: Jack Henry Moore, Michael Rudman...Lots of American plays and La MaMa came to the Traverse.

**Richard:** I'm sorry...

**Man:** Futz and Tom Payne...

**David:** I'm curious why that was?

**Richard:** It is because the intellectual elite was in the university. The students and Jim was American and I went to America in 1959. Can you imagine that?

**Man:** I thought you were going to say that it was because you managed to work for a hotel that had ensuite bathrooms.

[laughter]

**Man:** Which if I was a dialect I would...

**Richard:** My father had a big tent where all sorts of famous Scottish actors, Jimmy Logan, Chic Murray, Chic Murray's wife, all appeared there. Peter, but at the same time he had a fantastic French version of La Coupole in Paris. An awful orchestra...Everything was art deco ...Absolutely incredible.

What I want you to understand here is that I am an actual born as my father was, a mind-host. I'm the guy that stands at the door and says, "Mr. and Mrs. Johnson...well, we have your table". That's the way I deal with everybody that ever comes through the door at my gallery. Guess what the Traverse did.

The Traverse didn't come into to being as the Traverse did. They came into being 1962 as the Sphinx Club. It was an audience of four or five each night. On the walls were the signatures of Lawrence Donald, Henry Miller. I met Henry Miller. I met all of them.

We opened with that production, and within a year, it was inevitable that we would move the energy of theatre productions from the Paperback to the Traverse, which was enormous.

The audience was no longer limited to 9 or 10. It was 59, huge in a room this size. Anyway, that meant it was really about friendship, about shared value systems, folks, aspirations and ideals. It wasn't anything to do with money, but being Italian and a realist. If you are Italian and Irish blood that makes you Jewish or Polish or whatever. You are definitely an oddball.

I don't have a drop of Scottish blood. I have Irish blood because my great grandmother was somebody called Elizabeth McGinnis married to someone who survived the Famine . Imagine! Dublin was a great story.

The fact is I knew I had to find a way in which I could forgive all the madness of my childhood. I could help the Scots accept the great gift of the Festival.

Their Festival came into being a few hours after the founders were told, "No we can't do it." They were sitting having lunch and the rain coming down in the wonderful palatial building, which is the house in London of Lord and Lady Rosebery of Rosebery Estates.

She was a lover of opera and the only place that she could really love opera was Glyndebourne. Of course, the reason why...What's his name? He was running Glyndebourne for the Christie family.<sup>8</sup> You got to know the whole history.

He could see that the Glyndebourne Festival despite the fact that it had been in the opera house could put on opera. "No, we can't do. It's unthinkable. Rationing people, needing

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<sup>8</sup> The reference is to Rudolf Bing, who became first director of the Edinburgh International Festival.

medical treatment, not enough food, not enough clothes. You must be mad. Light up the castle. We don't have the money for that kind of thing. It's frivolous. It's odd."

She began to cry. It's a great big drawing room. Her group of arty-crafty people, artists who have made the mistake of loving opera.

By the way to get to Glyndebourne, imagine the journey by steam train from Edinburgh. No Airport to take you to the United States, if you want to go to see the Met. Nobody could fly the Atlantic in those days and all this American students had to come over by boat.

Really, the important thing is that...I can't believe it...he saw her crying so he left all of his hunting, shooting and fishing friends who were over one side of the road and they had been outside shooting things. It was an auspicious moment for him because something had happened on a racetrack. He was very famous for his horses.

He came over and saw her crying and he says "Darling what's happened?"

He says, "Darling, how much money is needed?"

"They want to seed money to put this thing together."

"How much?"

"£10,000."

That was the equivalent of quarter of a million, 1947. He said, "Oh, darling, wait a minute you don't know. Your mind is at ease. I have not had the chance to tell you that our horse won the Derby," I forgot what it was. "We have the £10,000."

The Festival came into being through divine intervention.

**Ben:** On the back of a horse.

**Richard:** These Americans have been coming over to go to the university, but what happened was that they were coming over to go to something else, their festival and Edinburgh was transformed.

It affected me. I don't think that it affected many people. What did I do? I insisted it not only was a club. We could drink. You know, drinks beyond 10 o'clock...no women were allowed out at night. It was completely Protestant. Nobody could be seen drinking.

We had a fantastic bar. It opened at 10 in the morning. We had the best restaurant in town and it was really something. Therefore, you could eat at midnight and drink. Therefore, in the first year of its existence, 1963 onwards it became the place where Kenneth Clark and David Frost, all the intellectuals were coming together.

In the year 1963 was the year of the Writers' Conference which caused a sensation cause of the half-naked woman being wheeled across the balcony of the, what do you call it? The University's McEwan Hall. That was John Calder working with Mark Boyle working with...What's his name? The Jewish American, Founder of Performances?

**Ben:** Kaprow, Allan Kaprow.

**Richard:** Who became a friend. It began to be the year when I knew I had to get on my bike and find a way. I had put on a major exhibition of Polish posters, theatre posters. I began to be very close to the Romanian Embassy, Polish Embassy, East German Embassy, West German Embassy, and that began.

Jim King made the mistake of...

**Ben:** Excuse me, sorry. Would you say did you see yourself at times as being a bridge between East and West then at that time?

[crosstalk] .

**Richard:** Oh yeah. That's why the MI6 began to have a dossier on me and why I was offered the job of being a spy.

**Man:** I didn't know that.

**Richard:** I said that...

**Man:** Oh, what was it like?

[laughter]

**Richard:** Oh, my god did I need the money. I said "What, you want me to betray, oh my. None of these people are communists, not one, not even the officials."

They were beginning to be a part of those brave 12 million human beings that were Solidarity. No other country could do this. The Czechs capitulated, the Hungarians. Only Poland and the Polish soul could do this.

I was already in love with Poland because of all the Polish children I was teaching and the Polish soldiers. The sight of the Polish Army in uniform kneeling before me as I was serving Mass. Shoulder to shoulder with the British Army, Catholics, all speaking Latin and the Italian prisoners of war with the big yellow circles on the desert uniform on the backs. The only place we could come together in prayer...

**Ben:** Where was this?

**Richard:** St. John's Portobello.

**Ben:** Oh, right. They were all sent down there from us?

**Richard:** No, they were at every parish, but particularly there, because of the camp.

**Ben:** And you were an altar boy.

**Richard:** Yes, I was also a choir boy. Of course, that's where I learned to respect the language of Latin, lingua franca, the language of every student. It's when universities actually encouraged you to use Latin.

Anyway, I knew I was getting an education that was way beyond the education for me to be an officer in the British Empire. It's very interesting, isn't it? Now, I could wear a medal around my neck telling you that I'm an Officer in the British Empire, an OBE, and also a CBE, a Commander. And it's very interesting, isn't it?

Why? Not because of art. Because of the political...the Germans gave me the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the German Federal Republic. It's never been given to an artist. Why? In the citation, 'Because of your work to help bring down the Berlin Wall'.

At the same time, the Polish ambassador gave me the Polish equivalent. Why did they both come up? They came up together because they know that my main job is to have Poland speak to Germany. Unless the Poles are working with the Germans, you don't have Europe.

Why did I commit myself to Germany? Because at that time Germany was [dismissive sound] an excrescence. It was split in two, and that's why the German avant-garde was so important to me. In Düsseldorf, and Baden and Cologne, you had every refugee.

You had all the German artists, the poets, the writers from East Germany, there. You had Romanians, Jews, you had Hungarians. You had everybody, all there. That's why. I was the guest of the American government in 1970, the first human being to be told, 'You're the guest of our government'.

I was told, 'You can have...,' after three weeks, '...government support. You could have a choice of all the great artists of New York, because New York is the European capital of the world of culture'.

**Ben:** ... much closer to a view, a discussion of, the art world, Richard, because that's really what the art world is about...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** But guess what?

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** Because of those avenues, it functions...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** But guess what I did? I've lectured in about 50 American universities, art schools, and museums. Guess what I did?

**Ben:** Tell me.

[laughter]

**Richard:** I arrived back. Imagine if I'd presented Rothko, Newman, De Kooning, in Edinburgh at the festival. I was director of the Edinburgh Festival's official, avant-garde, contemporary art programmes, on one condition. I was told by Peter Diamond, who was a Dutch Jew and director of the main festival in Amsterdam, the Holland Festival...

'Richard, you can...good idea, yeah, living artists there, you can show, you can do it...' -- I thought, 'Wow' -- '...for the official festival, -- wow -- '...on one condition. You have to pay for it'. I had to pay something like £2 million to run a 30-year program.

Practically all the productions that I put on...the best example was bringing the Cricot Theatre. By the way, I said no to New York, and yes to Düsseldorf. Everybody thought I was completely bonkers.

'What? Where's Düsseldorf? Doesn't exist'.

I said, 'The country's that divided in two'.

'That's bloody German!'

Then when I went further and supported the Romanians, because I could see they were going to be destroyed and made into a prison for 31 years through Ceaucescu. I got there before Ceaucescu. I was always interested in Romania, as well, because Tristan Tzara and these other intellectuals in Romania created Dada and the Cafe Voltaire.

John Calder had spent a great deal of his time at the University of Zurich, and he knew the Cafe Voltaire. I was already aware of where modernism, in part...this was totally unknown to the Scots. They were being educated on the Watsonian<sup>9</sup> way, and none of this is of any interest. All you have to do is run the empire.

**Ben:** I'll tell you most Scots weren't being educated in the Watsonian way. If most Scots had been educated in the Watsonian way, they would have been a bit better off. I've had a privileged education.

**Richard:** I know you did. I'm not saying that. I have a great admiration for what was the Scottish educational system. But now, of course, it's fallen apart because it's run by government.

**Ben:** The educational system has fallen apart because education's being run as a business, because the government is a servant of business, because the state doesn't have autonomy any more.

**Richard:** If that's the case, what happened?

The AGM came about because Jim says, 'Over my dead body, will I have this. We'll have Jack Henry removed'. Of course, he needed him. 'So I'm going to call an AGM'. He'd already hand-picked an alternative, because the committee said, 'We've got to resign'.

The only guy who didn't resign was me, from the original founding committee. We had the AGM, and he brought together his sycophants. Most of them to do with university, but the guy who was the number one chairman-type figure was a lawyer on the way up, a guy called Fairbairn.

**Ben:** Is that right?

**Richard:** [laughs] The next meeting of the AGM, there was a huge vote in favour of a new...We sat around a table, there was I -- I was chairman -- and there was the new committee. Up came the question raised by Jim's great friend -- so-called.

He said, 'Oh, yes, Jim, with regard to Jack Henry Moore, I can see there's a problem there, and I think that I must agree with the committee's decision. You can't have him. He's not employed'.

**Ben:** I suspect the play was.

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<sup>9</sup> Reference to George Watson's College in Edinburgh and its educational and social values.

**Richard:** Yeah, then Jim said, 'Oh, well, I can tell you all now, the reason....I would resign if I can't have him'.

**Ben:** [laughs]

**Richard:** I said, 'Excuse me everybody. Can I just take Jim aside'? I took him out of the room and I said, 'Jim, do you realise what's happening? By law, they, they...you are an employee. You made the mistake of being the artistic director. We all know you're the artistic director, because you're one of the founders.

'It's our minds that makes the decision. We decide what's going to happen. We don't ask the employees to decide, and no theatre has ever been built on that basis. It's the intellectual life of John Calder, myself, Jim, and various others who are calling the shots'.

He said, 'No, no, I'm not going to give up'. I said, 'Jim, I'm going to suggest to you that you wait. You set up for another meeting. You have a right, and I'll propose it. Let's discuss this at the next meeting'.

**Ben:** Sounds like a long-missing chapter from the Meissen Camp dialogues.

[laughter]

**Richard:** That's what I tell you.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I tell you, it was like Caesar's assassination, with friends like that.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Richard:** We came back in. Jim sat there, and he said...I can hear the voice, still. I think it was sexual jealousy. I'm not quite sure what it was, but I knew this guy had it in for him. He said, 'Well, Jim, I think we've got to clear this matter. What did you say? That you'd rather resign than not accept the committee decision? I think we have to call a show of hands'.

The hands went up, and my hand was not up, but I thought ...

He said, 'Well, are you still offering your resignation'?

'Well, yes, of course'.

'Ah, well we have to accept it. Therefore we have to put in an advert. Of course, you can apply'.

Oh, God, and of course...

**Ben:** He just couldn't believe? He didn't have any idea that...

**Richard:** No, but I then I learned a great deal, because...I'll tell you what happened. He then was told by Fairbairn, 'Come back home, and we'll talk about this in my castle, Fordell. He went back, I went back to my house, where my friends, the former committee, were sitting saying, 'What happened?' Told them the terrible news.



Jim was in a hell of a state, to such an extent he jumped out of the 12-foot drop from a tower in the castle, escaped in the middle of the night, somehow got himself to Edinburgh and appeared in my kitchen.

[laughter]

**Ben:** ...Fairbairn's castle...

[laughter]

**Ben:** He was more worried about losing the job...

[laughter]

**Ben:** ...Nicholas Fairbairn, my God!

[laughter]

**Richard:** I thought, 'I've learned a great lesson here'.

**Man:** It seems once the Traverse became famous and attracting attention, people start to argue and bicker about who is responsible and who could take credit.

**Richard:** I didn't tell you. You've got to understand why it is the shape it is now.

**Ben:** But people are blameless, and that's very...

[laughter]

**Richard:** This is what he's going to do. Thinks he's going to put it together.

**Ben:** I think David should just...or Brian, you need this kind of Brechtian other. You need to play you, Richard Demarco, or a sort of Brechtian counterpart. Put yourself in the spotlight...

[crosstalk]

[laughter]

**Richard:** What happens...therefore Jim is persona non grata in Edinburgh, helpless. But, he immediately said, 'I'm going to London, because I've got friends there -- Jenny Lee and all these people. Of course, we're friends when it was the Traverse, but when he started creating things like the Arts Laboratory...The Traverse would put on shows in London and in South...what do you call it? Central...

**Man:** The Cochrane Theatre?

**Richard:** The Cochrane Theatre and all that. But it's a different ball game. I knew the English shouldn't lose the friendship of Jenny Lee and all that, because he created the 'Suck Magazine', the Wet Dream Festival, and...my God, there's so many things. I knew, if the London thing was going to last...

Anyway, I then realised, as founder, the last remaining member of the committee that was a founder...there were four or five. Look in the...you'll see the names. My God, one of the four founders...the founders of the Demarco Gallery were the founders of the Traverse, Jimmy

Walker, John Martin -- you should speak to John Martin -- and Andy Elliott, who's just died. I've just written his obituary. I seem to be born to do that.

I ran the gallery and Traverse Theatre Gallery. We sold £10,000 worth of art from all over the world in the first year. That was like a quarter of a million pounds worth. No gallery in the history of Scotland had ever shown...

[Cross talk]

**Ben:** I seem to remember that, in the Grassmarket Building.

**Richard:** No, that's rubbish, the Grassmarket. It was always...

**Man:** James Court.

**Richard:** James Court. Can I just point out? For me, the founding for the theatre was the gallery and it was the income from club membership, and the sale of art. But, it was there that everybody could see I could put together a gallery programme unlike anything in London -- completely international.

**Ben:** That must have been quite a new thing in Britain to have a gallery and a theatre together.

**Richard:** Nobody had ever heard of it, and they didn't even conceive of a restaurant. But, wait a minute.

Yeah, you'd find Jacques Lecoq, Lord Harewood, everybody there, everybody. The point is it became this...the Fringe and the official festival went together.

The highlight of that 1963 year was the festival production of a play called 'Comedy, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Meaning', by a complete failure, a complete lunatic nutcase, who died aged 29. He was 24 when he wrote this masterpiece -- a German, of course, the very heart of European theatre.

Anyway, I guess who was in the audience -- 1963? -- J B Priestley, Eva Dalby the painter, you name it, they were all sitting in front of me. I thought, 'My God, if a bomb drops here, that's intellectual life of the world, in terms of theatre'. I thought, 'This is it, isn't it? This is the greatest thing that could happen'.

Anyway, what I'm trying to get at is once this bunch of people took over...because by then it was not a bad idea to be associated with the Traverse. One or two Scots, actors, came in, because they could see it wasn't a bad idea.

Anyway, the board who founded bloody thing went to the office of Fairbairn. They said, 'Obviously, Richard would like to...' came up with the idea, which is that the Traverse...the Traverse theatre, obviously has to remain in the Old Town, but the gallery should move to a four-story new town premises, which we have just bought for £14,500, in Melville Crescent.

'Of course, we've just come here to say, obviously, we want to use the name, because this will help the Traverse. You'll be in the New Town, not just in the Old Town. It will bring money in'.

I knew what he was going to say, 'Oh, we can't do that'. By law, some kind of legal thing, you cannot call it a Traverse Gallery. Be very careful when you're talking about the history of Traverse, the history of what I've done.

We left, John Martin, Andy Elliott, and myself, 'Oh, God', because we're going to be opening for the Edinburgh Festival in 1966. I was still running the two -- the gallery there and the Demarco Gallery. There was a period of about three or four weeks until we opened, and we had to decide what the name was.

Now these are my friends supporting me, and after about a week, we had a meeting. I said, 'I think...Oh, dear. I've listened to everybody's idea of the name -- The Blue Gallery, The Pink Gallery, The Melville Crescent Gallery, The Modern Gallery, The International Gallery'.

I said, 'I don't think any of these names work, because I believe that the best galleries in London are named, like good restaurants, by the person running it'. The Wallington Gallery is Wallington. The Browse and Darby Gallery is run by Browse and Darby. The Castelli Gallery in New York is run by Leo Castelli

'Why don't we call it the Demarco Gallery'? [laughs] I could see by their faces...'Hmm. Let's think about it', because what does the name Demarco signify? Fish and chips and ice cream.

**Ben:** In Edinburgh, yeah, that's right.

**Richard:** So I said, 'Look, I'm going to give you...I think we have to have another meeting'.

'Of course we have. We have to open with a name'.

I said, 'OK, let's meet again', so we met again and I said to them, 'Over my dead body will we call it the Demarco Gallery'.

**Ben:** You said that?

**Richard:** I said that.

**Ben:** Oh, you said that. All right, all right. To get a rise?

**Richard:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**Ben:** OK. [laughs]

[crosstalk]

[laughter]

**Richard:** I would have said yes.

**Ben:** But you made some good ice cream, after all.

[laughter]

**Richard:** My father's ice cream was the best in Edinburgh. But I said, 'No, I think it has to be called the Richard Demarco'.

**Ben:** [laughter]

**Richard:** That's why it was called the Demarco Gallery. And these good friends of mine, they go, 'Argh'.

[laughter]

**Richard:** Anyway, I said this because I think the greatest history of visual art is associated with the Italian Renaissance and all the greatest artists, ever, you could think of. I'm going back to Leonardo, Michelangelo, all Italian names. I said, 'That's the kind of mind...'. That's to tell you what it means to have a name like mine. I'm not called Logan. That would have been OK. The Logan Gallery would have been perfectly acceptable.

Anyway, that's how that, also, I decided it had to be about theatre, music -- orchestral music, choral music -- and avant-garde theatre. From the very beginning, it had that. By 1972, when I was having to put together the green exhibition of Polish avant-garde art, and the Polish government had just told me, 'If you don't take Grotowski, we can't help you. We'll give you, whatever it is, 50,000 quid to present him'.

I said, 'No, I don't want him'.

'Why?'

I said, 'Because he's already famous. I don't want to be a servant. I'm not one of these guys that puts up something famous. I put people on who need help'.

They said, 'Well, Kantor doesn't exist. The Cricot 2 Theatre is not...we don't know who it is'.

That was a big decision, because I knew I would have to mortgage my house and everything else. I also knew they weren't going to get visas. The Brits have no idea what real theatre is about. They think theatre is created by theatre people. They don't realise that theatre is created by writers, philosophers, and, most of all, visual artists -- sculptors, painters, poets.

**Ben:** It's created by audiences, as well. That's the special thing about...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I went bonkers in Warsaw, because I was told that all 24 theatres are packed every night -- 24 theatres, with a great, big opera house.

The fact is I got Kantor over, under the aegis of the Demarco Gallery, in collaboration with the most famous museum of modern art in the world. Much more important than the Museum of Modern Art in New York, founded four months before the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It's the Muzeum Sztuki in Krakow, founded by the Jewish and Christian intellectuals, founded by Milavich, Picasso, Stravinsky.

The guy who was the director of that was my great friend Ryszard Stanislowski. I was working on that level. That's how I got the world's greatest theatre company to come here. It ends up that, through that contact, Ellen Stewart, La MaMa, brings Kantor to New York, with a resounding success -- Off-Off Broadway, of course. Then she presents him Paris. When I meet her in Paris, she says, 'Thank God...!'

You know the Traverse refused to have Kantor or anything like that. They're not built for that. They stopped being a club and they went into a dinner show. They became a theatre for Scottish playwrights, new writing in Scotland.

Anyway, she said, 'I'm so pleased that Kantor first came into some kind of haven and was recognised by the international theatre world, by being presented by a gallery'. You know he was the winner of the Rembrandt Prize, as a painter and a sculptor. All his casts were painters, sculptors, and art critics.

Can you imagine me trying to get this across to a theatre world in Britain, which is all about, first of all, the script? Completely forgetful of the great tradition of medieval...

**Ben:** Drama.

**Richard:** Yeah, and the villagers, morality plays, and everything else. You've got to understand that I love all aspects of theatre, and I was the one at the Traverse who insisted we did 'The Fantastics', because it was Off-Off Broadway, as entertainment of a certain kind, but questioning the nature of the American musical.

It was my idea that we should also, after three or four avant-garde plays, that we should show Noel Coward's 'Private lives'. I said, 'We've got to find points of interface'. Can you imagine the confusion? The Arts Council only gave money if you showed Scottish artists. You couldn't get any money from them if it was a foreign artist. 'What? I'm in the wrong country'.

You couldn't get any money...you're either a theatre or a gallery. I am questioning the use of the word bloody 'theatre', and I want to elucidate the meaning of the word 'galleria'! Galleria is a place where you walk up and down. It's where, for example, you have thoughts. It's the -- what do you call it, in a monastery -- the ambulatory.

**Ben:** You aren't getting it, your desire for a kind of cultural centre. Is that not what you're...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** No, I realised that if I create a cultural centre, that's not good enough, so I decided to create a university. The university was based on Black Mountain College, which was on a farm, called Black Mountain Farm in the North Carolina, with trees, farming, owned by a farmer. That was the American version of the Bauhaus. I'm running the Bauhaus, which is a university of the arts.

I created something called Edinburgh Arts, where I had Bucky Fuller, who was one of the teachers, Jack Tworikov. I had a guy called Stuart Hawkes, who was a student of the American dancers like Yvonne Rainer, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, John Cage.

It lasted for ten years and it was able -- it was in collaboration with the School of Scottish Studies -- to give six academic credits to any student, for example, of Yale or Harvard. Most of the students were from American universities, because the penny hadn't quite dropped with the Brits.

Now I am a fellow of Rose Bruford College, which is run by the guy who was the director Yale Theater studies, Michael Earley. I am hoping...because 50 percent of my archive is theatre. Who's going to take it. You can't really put it into a gallery of modern art, because they're not into theatre. So where's it go?

I think it should go Kingston or somewhere. My God, can you imagine the students you would get going to Kingston? You know, of course, that Traverse ceased to be a club. It's no longer a club. It became totally dependent on Arts Council funding, therefore Creative Scotland funding.

**Man:** It seems the administration became much more conventional once it started to receive public money.

**Richard:** Yeah. You have to sup with a very long spoon.

At long last, I don't know if you know, there was a debate in parliament, lasting an hour and a half, as a results of...what do we call it when you present something for the parliamentarians to...

It was an hour and a half, 32 MSPs inside, cross-party, presented by Linda Fabiani. The result was that the Scottish government....

**Ben:** This is before...

**Richard:** It was last year...decided that they should do something to celebrate Richard Demarco's 80th birthday.

**Ben:** Oh, I see.

**Richard:** That resulted in the government -- not the Arts Council -- deciding to give the Demarco Gallery the role normally given to the National Gallery to put up an exhibition in Brussels, in Scotland House.

**Ben:** In Scotland House?

**Richard:** Scotland House is in one of the main buildings of the European Parliament. It's where any parliamentarian, doesn't matter what party, can meet their equivalents in France, Germany, Poland, you name it. That's why, on the 14th of June, there'll be an incredible moment of truth.

Then, on top of that, the Italian government decide that there's got to be an exhibition.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** You haven't been given Berlusconi's seal of approval, have you?

**Richard:** No, no, no, no! This is a political manoeuvre. It's the 150th year of the unification of Italy. That's why. So they're using every single Italian cultural institute in the world to put on a show of Italo-French, Italo-German, Italo-English.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...this thing that we're involved in.

**Richard:** They chose seven out of 30 artists that were presented to them to represent Scotland. England is represented by one artist. I've got to tell you all this because...and the reason why your work is important to me, because I have presented God knows how many conferences and symposia on the subject of art at the human environment, and the housing of art in the 21st century, and art and science.

I have used spaces like prisons, where everybody in the prison is unacceptable because they're murderers or paedophiles, or whatever. I've used hospitals, and I've buildings that you can't imagine art to be in any way...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...depend on what cell you...I was involved in a Utopian-lefty, Utopian cultural policy study. I sold you one of our pamphlets about cultural democracy, did I not -- a few years ago?

**Richard:** What was that?

**Ben:** I remember meeting you at the parliament and getting to put off you, and selling you one of our pamphlets.

**Richard:** Oh, yeah.

**Ben:** It was the opening of parliament. I've got pictures up in the parliament that...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...were talking. Sorry.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I must make it clear to you that it's extraordinary, because for 50, 60 years, my motto is 'only connect', which is the motto of that great writer, 'Room with a View'.

**Man:** E M Forster.

**Richard:** E M Forster, right. My job is to connect the visual with the performing arts, which is the great European tradition. The miracle plays were all about...

**Man:** Visual imagery.

**Richard:** Yeah, and in places like Picinisco, it's the greatest procession. That's what it's about. I come from that. If I were the director of the Edinburgh Festival, I would make sure that you had that kind of theatre going through the streets. I'd use the buses, use the public transport. I think there's nothing more boring than to put on repertory theatre.

**Ben:** You asked me to send you some recent work. I send you a thing, which is called, 'Michael Jackson is Alive in Nigeria'. That's kind of photography and street theatre combined.

**Richard:** I think your mind is fascinating. I don't know how an artist comes about. I think it's because you've got a track record, which...there's someone writing about -- she's working for some university now -- 1976. 'To Richard, with many thanks for all your help'.

A story of the Traverse and the beginnings of the Demarco Gallery, which goes right back to a look at the conquest of indifference. That's *The Telegraph*. Richard Demarco Gallery, the Traverse, it's together.

I have never had a proper space, really, and I'm not going to be very long here, because it's costing £15,000 a quarter, rent. £150 a day, I can't find the money.

**Ben:** Where do you get the money? Is the Arts Council giving you any money?

**Richard:** No, there's no money for this.

**Man:** Can I look at this?

**Richard:** Yeah, I'm going to give you this to really study. I need to get a photocopy of the whole damn thing. This is written in 1976, and she's got a lot references here.

**Man:** Was this the MA thesis? There was a famous MA thesis that was written about the Traverse around that time. It must be a different...

**Richard:** Different thing.

Can I tell you, Joyce McMillan's essay doesn't have any of the story of how it came into being. The other things written about Traverse divided up into who was employee and who was the director. You don't want to deal with employees. They're paid to do something, just like an actor.

When the Traverse was open, we had to pay the actors, but nobody else was paid. No one.

You have to do it for love. Nobody was paid to run the manor. It had to be done for love. Love! Love of the truth. You can't get this across. It has to go on for years and years and years. Two of the young women here are not being paid because they need the experience. It's a kind of internship.

**Ben:** But it's hugely a problem. I see all that, and that's one of the reasons that arts or the creative colony is being peddled so much. People work for nothing and it's a precarious...

**Richard:** No, no, no. You don't...

**Ben:** Every time someone says, like you, Richard, says, 'Ooh, it's art and it's good for you', there's a whole queue of people saying, 'Yeah, it must be good for you'. Every time someone says, you, Richard says, 'It's art, and it's good for you'. There's a whole queue of people saying, yeah, it must have been good for you, because'...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** Can I tell you something? It is good for them because it teaches them not to go on towards the world of art. The world of art, you have no idea the number of people who have worked for me. One guy is the director of The National Portrait Gallery, one is...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** You mean...

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** Yeah, yeah. I'm saying to them, 'If you go into the world of art, in so-called arts...' First of all, there would have been no La MaMa -- actually impossible for her to have carried out that programme if it had been based on the conditions that everybody has to get paid the usual bloody money.

It's a lot of money you've got to pay people -- unionism, and you've got to pay health and safety. Nothing will happen like that, because no government is going to support that, because it's revolutionary and experimental.



[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I'm not talking...you can go into the world of art and ignore the lesson that's to be learned from what I've just told you, and you'll get a job. There's now a whole industry of people who are arts officers, so-called experts. The artist is run just as the health services -- the doctors, nurses, teachers -- by a whole army of people in between who are the functionaries, who run it.

**Ben:** It's been bureaucratised?

**Richard:** I've never been bureaucratised. Nobody's ever bought me. I've never sold my soul. Even when I was at Kingston, I thought, if I identify myself with the school of visual arts, that'll be in the world of fashion, design, and arts.

I identified myself with the school of business studies and law. If you're not part of the legal system, you don't understand that everything is dependent on the rule of law and adherence to that law, so that there's some kind of moral structure, which enables you to do things for the right reason.

I am not in the art world to make money or to entertain the general public. I'm in the art world to educate human beings to use the one language that has been used for centuries to define everything else. I'm in a world where I am, in fact, at odds certainly with the festival fringe.

I'm not in the Fringe, OK? I'm not in the official Festival, because what my philosophy is...you don't want to touch anybody who is actually taking people to the ...

**Ben:** I agree with you about bureaucratisation of the art world, but it's not confined to the art world, of course. It runs right across the public sector.

**Richard:** The whole public sector.

**Ben:** Hang on a minute. Let me...

[crosstalk]

[laughter]

**Ben:** Because there we have been sitting here, Richard, for about an hour and a half, or more.

**Richard:** But you wanted to hear the story because you didn't know the story.

**Ben:** This is a conversation, so let me just give you a different view.

I agree with you about the bureaucratisation, of course, but I don't think that bureaucratisation is confined to the art world, it runs from across...

**Richard:** Even the university world.

**Ben:** Absolutely. Universities are being run by people who don't care about education now, and who operate like...as one of my colleagues, who's retired professor said, 'We're being actually run by the Mafia'. Business gangs are putting universities into competition with one another, in the same way that David probably has experienced of all this, as well.

The bureaucratisation and managerialism I don't think is confined to the art world. But within the art world, and let's talk using 'art world' in the broadest possible sense, the 'art world' as you would use the term, in the broad sense of the arts -- what the arts can do for you, if you like.

My problem with that, and it's not about theatre or the art galleries, per se, but as someone who cares about culture and studies culture, spent most of life studying and working in culture, is that the arts are used as a Band-Aid.

**Richard:** [laughs] You're right.

**Ben:** Any time you've got a problem in the public sector, 'Oh, let's get an arts...'

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** That's why....

**Ben:** Richard, hang on a second. My very first job in the arts was for the Craigmillar Festival Society. You can imagine being someone who is sent to a public school, like George Watson's a private school. It was quite a culture shock for me to be working at a place, as a community photographer at Craigmillar.

Now Craigmillar, which you'll know very well...

**Richard:** Yeah, I helped define the whole Craigmillar Festival.

**Ben:** Yeah. That was set up because working-class mothers quite rightly objected to the fact that their kids couldn't get taught music in school. It was a very simple thing -- very, very simple. They had a complaint about the education they were getting at school.

People forget, in the arts -- people who should know better -- they forget that what people care about in culture, people who apparently need to be educated about culture, need to be enlightened by the arts literature, is that people took care about the services that are offered.

They care, for example, very much about their education. They care about things like public libraries. You very rarely hear anybody in the arts, very rarely. In my experience, I hardly ever hear anyone in the art work talking about public libraries. They don't give a shit about public libraries.

**Richard:** [laughs]

**Ben:** All of you people could sit around and you could have your public libraries closed down...

**Richard:** I know.

**Ben:** And none of you would give a shit. I'm talking about the Edinburgh Festival, the Fringe, all the rest of it. I'm too old for that. I'm 40. I'm not 83, Richard, but I've had 40 years of listening to people in the arts talk with great passion about the things that ordinary people actually don't care about.

When the art world wants something, we organise ourselves very, very well to get it. But we don't care about things that matter, like the way our kids are being educated, what kind of services we get from our public library, which is where most people...

**Richard:** Excuse me. The reason why I have survived is that apparently every single citizen in Edinburgh knows my name. It doesn't matter...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ... at least.

[laughter]

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** I'm talking about the fact that my great friends...I'm asked to be the one that opens the Craigmillar Festival, the Three Harbour Festival, because the common folk, as it were, understand I've never, ever left them out of the loop.

The other part is I agree with you, every single thing you've said, and your art is totally acceptable to me. It fits perfectly. I have, for example, been working with the people who created the Orange Movement and brought about the final collapse -- you know, the Orange Movement in Poland.

There was a guy called Colonel...he placed little dwarfs everywhere, at every street corner, these little dwarfs were put. The government could understand what these things were, and it was pulling apart the government.

When you work in Poland for 40 years, as I was, with a communist government, you know exactly it's a matter of life and death. When the guy you are working with, my favourite, my great friend, is put in prison as president of the Union of Polish Artists, is banged into prison for a year because of his art.

He refuses...that's never going to happen here, 'No artist is going to be put in prison'. Not yet, because art isn't taken seriously, because art is automatically about art colony and a paper. I only believe that I made some kind of impact when I'm on the front page, or when I'm in another page, other than the one assigned to the season reports and all that.

Everything's retrospective in the art world. You do a performance. Then somebody writes about. I am saying that you cannot effectively look forward in society, unless the artist is working in the very engine room, along with the so-called people trying to improve society.

I think it's very interesting that the government, not the art gallery, not the Arts Council, the government itself made a decision for me to have these lovely souls and it's a very strange thing.

When that happens, it opens the doors, automatically, and nobody can quite understand what happened. I'll tell you what happened. It's perfectly obvious that the strategy of the Scottish Government has to be that there's a role for Scotland in Europe.

Populating in any way you want, you can go to Poland, you can go to any...I think there are 150,000 Poles here, and I had Polish National Television here on Saturday, asking me to give my views on theatre, theatre education, art education, and education generally. They were

asking me? Why was I invited to speak to the Royal College of Surgeons? Why was I asked to speak to Royal College of Physicians?

I really believed that Beuys truth built in to his soul when he said, 'My definition of art, these lovely people have to have a meal to hear'.

**Jackie:** We're going to get to that point.

**Richard:** That's great.

He said reach out. I'm going to show you the statement, which he made in 1980 for me, about the collapse of the society, through the rotten structure of the economic disbursement of money. He said that if this goes on any longer, society will collapse. The American society will collapse, European society, and it's certain.

We had a great conference on the misuse of money and the circulation of money through the society. I just want you to know that once you start dealing with that, you come against the Arts Council, because they don't want you to do that. They won't give you any money to deal with Jimmy Boyle when he's still in prison. They'll give it to you when he's out of prison.

**Ben:** To be fair, the Arts Council, the Creative Scotland, let's call it, was a... for years now, at least throughout the New Labour years, has become completely...the arts are completely integrated into social policy. That is, in a way, the problem for me. It's a bit like higher education. What becomes a by-product of higher education, which is in-my-hat economic benefits, it might be good in other ways. That becomes the reason why you should fund it.

What's at stake in the university system in this county is enormous. We are a part of UNESCO treaties about condition that...It's worth bearing this in mind, because the arts are a small part of this. Higher education gets public support on a basis that is independent from both government and business. That is the universal rationale for it.

Now that higher education is funded...it does what government what tells it to, or it does what business tells it to, because once higher education actually does what government tells it to do or business tells it to do, then you've lost the universal basis for public support. You're no longer operating in the public interest, because the public interest is not business and it's not government. It's larger than both.

The problem with the arts is that the arts have become completely integrated into governance. You actually have no moral basis anymore to say you deserve public money, because you're part of governance.

**Richard:** Can I say? That's great. I'll tell you every single thought put into words, and it's very, very reassuring for me to hear you speak like that. The exhibition that I'm going to show in Brussels, if you really look at it, it is about the independence and dignity of the artistic vision, and why an artist makes anything worth tuppence.

Every single image is of the way...I can tell you how it nearly didn't happen, because the art world wouldn't allow it to happen, because it either had to conform to some government view or whatever. I want you to know it's about freedom.

Beuys said, 'Richard, my definition of art...' would you please translate, 'Kunst ist Capital'? 'Oh, OK'. I thought this is a test. I said, 'I know that it's often translated 'art is money' -- 'capital'".

He said, 'No, you're right. So what is it?' I thought, 'Well, there's an older word for Capital. It's wealth. So it could be that art is wealth'. 'Ooh, wow'.

He said, 'So what is the meaning of wealth'?

I said, 'It means health, well-being', so art is an expression of a state of well-being. It's a statement about the common good, the common wealth.

He and I then did an exhibition, which was based on that theory. It was about this concept of a free international university, a university system, which could...

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...at all. John Ruskin said the same thing.

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** That's why I work with John Ruskin foundation. Nobody understands that. They can't understand. They think John Ruskin is to do with sexual problems, the Pre-Raphaelites, and all that stuff. It's not. He's a Beuysian figure.

**Ben:** Or Beuys might have been a Ruskinian figure.

**Richard:** Maybe he is. We also discussed the 'Wealth of Nations', Adam Smith. You know that I'm the only artist, so-called, to deliver the Adam Smith Lecture. Others have all been bankers or money people. I'm the only person, and I'll give you the text of that lecture, which I delivered in the Adam Smith...in Kirkcaldy.

**Ben:** Adam Smith College?

**Richard:** Yeah, the college. I can't think of anybody who's ever been asked to give the Adam Smith Lecture. Can you? In the world of art? There's no way a human mind can get around that. I'm also the only person to address the European Parliament, so I'm going to be very, very careful in the way I put this exhibition together, which is related, for example, to your own work. I'm trying to integrate the Italian government strategy to have the Biennale called the La Biennale nel Mondo.

Therefore, I need your complete understanding, because you and I are exactly the same wavelength, whether it's the Italian blood coursing through our veins or whatever. At the age of 81, you're playing the game of life, not in extra time as when you are 70.

[background sounds]

**Richard:** ....time. I can't afford to...

**Ben:** Waste it.

**Richard:** I can't afford to waste a second. If my mind is not 100 percent focused on people I can take seriously, my mind's somewhere else. Have you got it? I'm sitting there thinking, 'Why am I talking to this fellow'? This is just diverting my energy away from the goal.

The goal is simple. Kunst ist Capital -- art is the common wealth. That's why Beuys became, and I call it figure, every single German human being, no matter who they are, knows the name of Joseph Beuys. That's why he is linked to Leonardo.

You know he was a scientist, a philosopher, a botanist, a doctor, a farmer. He was all these things. I've got to go speak at a conference on Rudolf Steiner and the blackboards, simple teaching -- Beuys' blackboards, Steiner's blackboards -- unbelievable. If you see what's written in them, unbelievable. My world is Ruskin, Steiner, Beuys, Goethe, Schiller, and all of that.

If you take it all together, it's free from the way you compartmentalise art -- a school of theatre, a school of visual art, a school of law -- all under the aegis of a university called the University of Kingston. Here am I, emeritus professor of European cultural studies. That's who I am. Do you understand that?

It means a lot to me that that's my role. Until I bring the Scots, the Irish, the English, and the English-speaking world back into a way of thinking that they have to accept all the great geniuses who weren't speaking English, speaking other languages, into the thought process, I am wasting my time using art.

I'm not using art to become famous in the art world. In fact, I'm not famous in the art world. I'm employable in the art world. Nobody's going to take a risk on me, because... The National Gallery has four archives -- the National Gallery of Scotland. One is the Roland Penrose archive, one is the Paolozzi archive, one is the Gabrielle Keiller archive, who was the patron of Paolozzi, and the other is the Demarco archive.

Why is it that if you go to the National Gallery now, you won't find any evidence of the Demarco archive, although there are 1,000 boxes and art works over the roof of the National Gallery? How could you possibly put my work into an easy statement?

Nevertheless, the government has decided that these young people... 162 people applied for the job, three were chosen, and they're working against the clock to put together what I've just been talking about. A coming together, certainly of the visual and performing arts and the world of science -- any aspect of science, including medical science.

Actually, you're going to get society collapsing and unhealable if you don't realise that human beings are now suffering from despair. That's why the drug thing is overwhelming. Education doesn't work, because you're educating people to feel totally useless and unemployable.

You don't care enough, and when people go into the gallery at the weekend or when they have got enough time, they're off duty. [claps] You can't be off duty if you're talking about art. It's the language you use to bring down the Berlin Wall or the Iron Curtain.

If you're working, as I was for 30 years, with members of Solidarity, and you know that they're being killed, they're being shot, they're disappearing, because they're using art as the language which undermines the communist system, you know that they believe that and you know that it's...

**Ben:** Yeah, but it's labour. It was labour power that undermined the communist system. It was labour power.

**Richard:** No, no, no. If you worked in that thing, you were working with the trade unions, you were working with shipyard workers. You were working with every single aspect of society. I learned a great deal from that.

**Ben:** It's the same trait people in Western Europe forget. Of course, Thatcher, famously said, 'We're in favour of trade union rights, when she was dismantling them here. In fact, the OILC, the oil workers trade union's banner, is the letters O-I-L-C, borrowed from the Solidarity design.

**Richard:** Yeah, that's right.

**Ben:** Because the fighters were sent in to the bar listening to Margaret Thatcher speaking. If they could have a real trade union in Poland, then why can't we have a real trade union in Britain. That was the basis of the fighting.

The first is the factor of OILC, first in 1997 Tony Blair came to the Aberdeen Trades Council and told us that, in Britain, if New Labour was elected, he would repeal all the anti-trade union legislation, which is enormous -- enormous legislation.

In the same week, he was at CBI saying the exact opposite to them. Of course, we've still got the anti-trade union legislation. But, just to get back to your point, Richard, labour power was important, and much more important than art, in bringing down communism.

**Richard:** OK, can just...

**Ben:** John Paul, II was also Polish, and he...

**Richard:** Oh, yeah.

[crosstalk]

**Ben:** ...bishop before becoming Pope.

**Richard:** Even the Communists said it's worth 500 battalions, or whatever. It was a huge army.

**Ben:** Stalin said that.

**Richard:** It was Stalin, yeah. I've got to point out that Beuys was only concerned with human treatment and dignity. That's why he and I were friends. That's why we were. I never, ever presented Beuys. I never, ever presented Kantor. I don't present people. I don't say, 'I'm going to show you'. What I do is I say, 'I admire you, what you stand for.

'You've got to understand what I stand for. I'm not bringing you to Scotland to put on a bloody art thing. I'm asking you to come to Scotland for you to understand Scotland. I'm going to give you a situation, which is impossible. I'm going to put you into a pool house, a condemned building, which hasn't been used for 15 years, which was a workshop, a place of work.

'Nobody's going to touch it with a barge pole. No artist wants to go there, and it's in a graveyard, where thousands of people die either of starvation as political prisoners, as debtors, or as people who are dying and just got out of the poor house. Bedlam it's called'. There's a place called the Bedlam.

That's where I'd placed Kantor. That's where I introduced Kantor to Jimmy Boyle. Jimmy Boyle, when he met him, said, 'Joseph, my name is Jimmy Boyle. I am a coyote'.

When Beuys went to America, he said, 'I don't want to speak to anyone who represents the art world in America. I don't want to speak to President Nixon. I want to speak to the symbol, which makes American society a disgrace. I want to speak to the animal, which is the most despicable creature on the planet'.

Instead of being the sacred creature that the Indians regarded, the coyote, it's the one you threw stones at, you shoot. You kill the coyote. He imprisoned himself in a cage with a coyote for two days, and he brought there on a stretcher. He never saw anybody, he never speak anyone, just the coyote.

It defecated, of course, on the Wall Street Journal and everything else. It was the most brilliant statement. But I knew that I had to bring Kantor here, or Beuys. Because I was talking to them the language they understood.

But Beuys said...I said, 'Jimmy Boyle', and there's a photograph here where I say 'Jimmy Boyle'. He says, 'Who'? I say, 'Jimmy Boyle. He is the most despised enemy of society. It's in all the headlines. He's a murderer'. He is a murderer, although Jimmy would admit it, really. But, he was one of the gang leaders in the collapsed society of Glasgow, of course -- Roman Catholic.

By the way, most of the people banged up in our prisons are either Roman Catholics, Glaswegians, Irish, or former soldiers. There's a fantastic high percentage of people coming back from being involved in legalised killing, who end up in prison.

Anyway, what I'm getting at is I was the one that went to Portsmouth, young offenders. I was the one that brought...the people that had been on death row in San Quentin, who created a theatre company called The Cage, working with Sam Beckett. They put our play in Portsmouth, under my direction, which caused a riot in the prison.

It was about what happens to young offenders in San Quentin, how they are sodomised and just reduced, within months, to the worst possible human wrecks. This play made such an impression on the governor of Barlinnie Prison, who was running an impossible job.

He was the guy that came to me and said, 'You've heard of the cages in Inverness, where six of the most unruly prisoners have been banged up, stripped naked in Scotland? Can you help us? We've just released them and we've put them into an experiment called the special unit. You are the one that maybe can help us'.

It was one of the great moments of my life. I want you to know that the last time that Joseph Beuys came to this country -- you don't know this about me, then you got me wrong.

I said to him, "I don't want the Exhibition," which is the official exhibition at the Festival, to be about Northern Ireland, Belfast, Derry, or the issues of North-South, North-North, unemployment and misuse of money. I think it should be about the dignity of a human being who becomes an artist who happens to be a murderer in a prison.

Therefore, I've got to tell you that the classic situation is that Jimmy Boyle has been moved from a special unit after seven years of exemplary behaviour. He's scared rigid that he's going to be booked back into a prison but his life will be at risk and it means nothing.



Beuys has dedicated his time at the end of the festival to making two blackboards called the Jimmy Boyle Dais. He also went on hunger strike. Can you imagine this? He then took out a court case against the Secretary of State for Scotland.

As soon as that happens, the guy responsible for the visual arts section of the Scottish Government, The Arts Council, Director of the Visual Arts Committee for the Festival and the Director of the National Galleries of Scotland, Head of the Arts Council, hears about the court case against the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State's Office phones up and says, "What's going on? What is this? Some foreigner, Beuys, something. There's a court case against the Secretary of State for the unlawful nature of the Scottish Prison Service."

Beuys said to me, "Do I have your support?" I said, "Well Joseph, the only thing I can tell you is that it's going to cost you a lot of money. You're not going to win." It must have cost him about £60,000 or £70,000.

**Ben:** Where did he get the money from?

**Richard:** He was selling his art. He was selling most of his art by then so that he could plant 7,000 Oaks.

A kangaroo court was setup. It was definitely unlawful because there was only one other member of the committee there. The guy called in. I was arraigned before them in the Arts Council office. They had two officers, the Director and the guy directing the Visual Arts, not the guy directing theatre by the way. The upshot was I was accused of bringing dishonour to the meaning of art.

**Ben:** Really? That's a fantastic story, that. This was...

**Richard:** 1980.

**Ben:** This was a direct result of the court case?

**Richard:** Beuys going on hunger strike.

**Ben:** Was this merited?

**Richard:** Not really. I'm telling you.

There's a guy sitting here. I should have smelled a rat because he often made coffee and the judge had a biscuit. I had two of my representatives of my board, nice people, with me. Right across the table, "You have brought dishonour to the meaning of art."

I said, "Well, I couldn't have done it on my own."

[laughter]

**Richard:** Then he says, "You know why that happened? He's Knighthood had gone out the window in order for this to happen. You understand?"

**Ben:** Who was in charge?

**Richard:** The Director of...

**Ben:** Who was at that time?

**Richard:** A man called...

**Ben:** This must have been in Lindsay Gordon's day.

**Richard:** He was ordered...It was before Lindsay Gordon. That's right, Lindsay Gordon. He never gave me a penny...Before, the Arts Council was riven with the horror of seeing every time Richard Demarco's name comes up, you could forget knowing anything. OK, because Richard Demarco had dishonoured..."You have dishonoured the meaning of art. You have dishonoured the meaning of art in Scotland."

[crosstalk]

[laughter]

[crosstalk]

**Richard:** The third one was, "You've dishonoured the meaning of the Demarco Gallery."

I said, "Excuse me?"

[laughter]

**Richard:** "Can I warn you before we go any further?" I said. "Did you know that a month ago, Joseph Beuys ...He was lucky enough because the exhibition that he had put on at the Guggenheim, which was a fantastic success." The first living artist to be given the Guggenheim.

**Ben:** I must admit, you reminded me of a joke about the boy who goes to the blow up school. He's the inflatable boy who goes to the inflatable school with inflatable teachers. Everything is inflatable. One day he goes with a pin.

[laughter]

**Ben:** He's called up before his Headmaster and the Headmaster says to him, "You've let your parents down. You've let your teachers down. You've let the school down. But above all, you've let yourself down."

[laughter]

**Richard:** I mean you would have laughed too. And then I said, "Do you realise, I was representing Joseph Beuys and the German government has paid about £30,000. I have all the German experts brought over."

I say, "Is it not important to you that about 200,000 New Yorkers went to see this show?" His answer was, "Whatever is going on in New York is nothing to do with what's going on in Scotland."

[laughter]

**Richard:** I thought "Oh, my God." Then I felt a great compassion. I said, "Excuse me, I'd just like to you tell you something." He looked at me and he said [raps on table] "You're

finished!" "You're finished." This is getting out of hand. This is not the way a government official should be dealing with a citizen.

**Ben:** He wasn't a government official. He was an Arts Council or a member of the Arts Council...

**Richard:** No, he was a government official. The government pays for the National Gallery. His employer is the government. They give the money to the National Gallery. These guys, they don't make any money unless they're getting it from the government.

**Ben:** Yeah, but this was an Arts Council meeting.

**Richard:** Doesn't matter, that's government.

**Ben:** Yeah, this is an arms' length...

**Richard:** I don't care a damn, it's the government.

**Ben:** No, but it's a good story though. It's nice to get the facts straight.

**Richard:** Admit it. Excuse me. I said, "Look, this is a death sentence. A normal human being is not going to recover. It's not 50 percent right or wrong. There's no shade here. It's completely black and white."

A great artist knows things that no ordinary human being knows. They have to be honoured. No one in the art world should countermand the view of the great artist. No matter if they're James Joyce writing a load of rubbish that nobody wants to publish.

I said, "100 percent I'm wrong. You're right. What happens if my defence of Beuys makes me right? You have brought dishonour to the meaning of the Scottish Arts Council."

He took that on board and then he said, "You're finished."

[laughter]

**Richard:** Of course he's not good. He died in a kind of sense of...I think there was guilt there. From that moment on, I received...I ceased...Just before that, he said "We've removed all support, all government...You don't deserve any public money. All support."

I said, "What about the exhibition?" --The official exhibition, which had just started. He said, "Well, we've removed that as well." I said, "Well that's not going to make the German government happy."

From that moment on, I had ceased to receive yearly support for whatever I do. I didn't like going through the humiliation, having to go to ask for each individual...You've got the Arts Council, and they say "Well, we think that's OK." I'm not that kind of person.

**David:** How much does this have to do with people's egos and power as opposed to anything else?

**Richard:** I hit a nerve. I thought, because he had been helpful, I felt sorry for him. I could see he was held responsible by the powers that be for allowing this madman, Beuys. And by the way, he was the world's expert on Raphael.

**Ben:** Who was this?

**Richard:** A man called Colin Thompson.

He and I tried to work together again but it's sort of difficult to forgive someone who's just destroyed you. I was a pariah. The Arts Council with great reluctance...What they should have done was to say "You've achieved a great...You've brought a genius." It's the equivalent of Picasso. It's the equivalent of Duchamp. Nowhere in the history of Scotland in the 20th century was there any engagement with any great genius.

**Ben:** What happened to Beuys's case against the Scottish State?

**Richard:** He lost.

**Richard:** It's all written there. This is very important. You can look at it because it's an artwork. He said, "This is all an artwork."

**Ben:** Situationism?

**Richard:** That's right. You'll see the photographs of us using our legal team to put it forward.

**Ben:** I don't know that much about Beuys. I presume he must have been very influenced by Guy Debord and the Situationists.

**Richard:** Yeah of course. Guy Debord. One of my board of directors of the Demarco European Art Foundation was a great friend of Guy Debord and also the French guy...Who was he? He fell out after a while.

**Ben:** The English Situationist?

**Richard:** Yes, who was married to Peggy Guggenheim's daughter. She never forgave him...She said...The Situationists are very important. I've written about this and it's all in my archives. This is of course about the protest by the students in Paris. It's about questioning education.

**David:** The Situationists were very influential during the protests in Paris in '68.

**Richard:** I think their philosophy is absolutely right on the nail. I don't think any arts council could ever have supported them.

The other part of the Dada exhibition which I saw in Paris, they had a whole section devoted to them. Now, the book I'm going to give you... there's a section called "With Demarco and Dada" and then "Demarco and Therefore Fluxus."

**Ben:** Have you ever read some Raoul Vaneigem, the Dutch Situationist, his history of JT Dupreis. Have you ever come across that?

**Richard:** I'd love to read that.

**Ben:** It's very beautiful.

## Appendix Four

### Charles Marowitz Interview

5 June 2011

Malibu, California

**David Weinberg:** First of all, thank you Charles for volunteering your time, allowing me to interview you and for helping me with my project.

**Charles Marowitz:** No problem.

**David:** I guess I wanted to start with a question. A lot of commentary on the alternative or fringe theatre in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, identifies what could be described as a kind of access between groups that were interested in political engagement and those that were interested in aesthetic innovation. And I was just wondering what you thought of that notion, is that actually true, that there was this kind of different camps of work that was going on, or if it's rubbish.

**Charles:** Generally speaking it's true, but I think the ratio between the serious political stuff and what you call the aesthetic material was very wide. Most people who were running theatres and doing stuff were concerned with experimentation and they felt that they were realising, or trying to realise, the works of Artaud and the philosophy of somebody like that. So, the kinds of theatres that I most noted and the ones that made the greatest satisfaction in terms of the material, were those that were doing what you might call aesthetic work because then, as they say, it was a period when nobody really trusted the word anymore, and so it sort of opposed dialogue and text. They were still there, but it's more likely to have had a Happenings act or a group that's fiddling around with a classic in a different way. I shuttled between the two. We did a little political stuff, but we did a lot more of Shakespeare adaptations and all kinds of experimentation and Shakespeare; we did versions of Shakespeare.

**David:** There was a production where you rode in a bathtub down Tottenham Court Road that symbolised the US navy or was an anti-Vietnam play?

**Charles:** That doesn't ring any bells.

**David:** It was a kind of publicity stunt. A bathtub was driven down Tottenham Court Road, to generate publicity for a production, if I remember correctly.

**Charles:** I don't remember that in terms of the Open Space. I do remember we were one of the groups that rented Trafalgar Square and we had put on, we had a little wagon, and when it came into the square, people had found out that it was there, and there was a big cluster of people around it. And it consisted of a small wooden stage and a girl in sort of Korean dress was on, not contemporary clothes, and the music was playing and she was doing a strip. So little by little, men particularly gathered around to watch the striptease, and the music played behind as she was doing the strip. Then when she got down to the end of the strip you could see that she had been bruised and beaten. Or in other words, after having your sexual appetites stirred up, you found it was actually a comment being made on the Vietnamese War. And those kinds of things where we just tried to create things out of known quantities

was a lot of what we did at the Open Space. So the question of being American, there was a lot of American stuff that we did, which I think we talked about last time. And we did premieres of *The Tooth of Crime*, Sam Shepard stuff. I'm trying to think of who else...

**David:** John Guare.

**Charles:** John Guare. I've lost track of them it was so long ago...

**David:** Mike Weller.

**Charles:** Mike Weller. We did a few productions of Mike Weller at the Open Space.

**David:** You said there was a problem with the British audiences, that they had difficulty relating to the subject matter and the kind of American language. Do you feel that's changed over time, have British audiences been able to engage with American playwrights in a way that they weren't at that time?

**Charles:** Well, that's something you would know the answer to, rather than I. Because I've been out of the London scene for quite a while. But, yes we, what was the point you made before that?

**David:** Well, that you had mentioned in our email exchange that there was a problem, a drawback, in doing American work. That you tended to do it anyway because of the quality of the writing and so on.

**Charles:** That's right. When we did *The Tooth of Crime* or the Mike Weller stuff, it was a matter of a different sort of language. I mean, American is really not English, there are too many differences. The elements that are brought into play when you are doing an American play, are of course American, rooted in the American experience. If there is no parallel understanding on the part of the Brits, then it was confusion. When we did *Tooth of Crime*, the people who liked that were mostly Americans. Many of the British people there didn't understand what it was about, they couldn't interpret the play. And there was a premiere of the play, and I saw it and I thought as we were doing it, this isn't the best way to make a premiere of this play, in this place and at this time, but as time went on and people became aware of Shepard's talent and how it expressed itself, that became less and less of a problem. So that you found, there were two or three major Off-West End theatres run by Americans. I'm thinking of a guy and his wife ran something, and I can't remember their names. That's all referred to in her book.

**David:** Here. In the chronology in the back?

**Charles:** I can't remember their names. If I remember, it was...

**David:** These were theatre folks, for Off-West End theatres?

**Charles:** Off-West End theatre. Very much like the Open Space, but probably smaller. We had a very large space, generally speaking. We seated about 280. The box seating could be arranged in such a way that there could be less of it or more of it.

**David:** I remember you specifically wanted to design the space. It was at the Tottenham Court Road space, so that it was modular, that you could change the playing space and the audience space, and alter things around depending on the needs of the particular production. Is that something from Artaud?

**Charles:** No, that was just strictly the fact that we wanted certain plays that were not conventional plays written by conventional dramatists, and they asked for a different kind of action on the stage. And we needed to actually create a different sort of stage in order to be able to play it truthfully and properly. So there were many plays like that. There was one we did about how the Hungarian, the Czech... I can't remember his name now, for which we used two or three platforms. And when we did the Picasso play...

**David:** *The Four Little Girls*

**Charles:** *The Four Little Girls*, we completely transformed the theatre into a sort of, a kind of countryside.

**David:** And the audience had to sort of enter into the actual environment.

**Charles:** In order to get to the theatre, they had to go through a little door, a tiny little door, which was just enough for one person to go through. So as they came to the theatre, anticipating that the last time they were there, there were seats and everything onsite was pretty conventional, they found that they had to crawl through this tiny little space in order to get to the other side. When they got to the other side they saw maple leaf trees, and a set that was completely surreal and I think very much in keeping with Picasso's play. Talking about the differences in the environment, when we did our first production of *Fortune in Men's Eyes*, we also, we turned the whole place into a sort of penitentiary situation.

**David:** That was your first production at the Open Space?

**Charles:** That's right.

**David:** 1968

**Charles:** Right. That's why I say, what we were doing, we were pretty early there on the Off-West End scene. Eventually a lot of other theatres came into being, but I think that we were probably the first because we started not at the Open Space theatre, but at the British Drama League.

**David:** With the In-Stage

**Charles:** With In-Stage, that's right. That was a first taste that I think the English theatre had of a foreign group, the foreignness being America, to what we were doing. That was a very tiny theatre, and it was in a public library there, and we had a very good working relationship with the people who ran it, and we carried over some of the things that we did there into the Open Space. Those would have been the plays that resisted additional interpretation. That wanted and needed to have a different kind of set, and a different kind of acting style and all the rest of it. The thing that fell into that Artaud, Grotowski kind of pit, that was there all the time during that period.

**David:** You mentioned *The Tooth of Crime*, and there was a conflict with Sam Shepard regarding the Elvis character, Hoss. You felt that Hoss should win one of the rounds. You added a round, there were three rounds in the play, and you thought it was critical that Hoss win one of the rounds. Is that accurate?

**Charles:** My memory of it is that there was a very long second act and a short first act, and a very long second act and I felt that it needed something to bridge the two. And we had a group there, a musical group, a band of players, and on my own volition I organised a melody that they could play, that they'd been playing all along, that they could play as a piece when we turned down the mics and say this is an interval and you can go out and come in again. That was a point when Sam felt, he wasn't in favour of that, he wanted to go straight through. And I said, well I don't think people are going to sit down for how long the play is, for that period of time, without having a break, in that place where we organised it. So, that was my slight creak with Sam, was that particular moment in that play. But generally speaking we had a fairly good relationship, most through the rehearsal of the production and I think he was a little bit disappointed by the reviews, because, and I said to him, you're not going to get British drama critics to come and understand what you're talking about. So I think he was a little sort of troubled with that, but it actually garnered a very large American audience. God knows where they came, but a lot of people knew something about Sam Shepard, but hadn't seen much of the work, so that was a highlight of the work we did. And I can't tell you now what year it was. It's all jumbled together.

**David:** I can find it, it's 1971 or 1973. But in any case, throughout your career you've had an emphasis on finding, establishing a space and a permanent company. But there were other companies like The People Show or other experimental theatre companies that had perhaps more of a fluid approach. I was just wondering if you think, if you still believe it's worth it. That all the trouble to establish a space and a permanent company is worth all of the trouble.

**Charles:** Well, I think so too. I think this is an idea that has fallen off the wayside for a lot of people, but I was brought up in my theatrical background with the story of the creation of Harold Clurman's the Group Theatre. So, I sort of brought a lot of those... That was the first thing... When I was very young I read that nice book and I met with Harold Clurman, and that sort of seeped into my being.

**David:** *The Fervent Years*?

**Charles:** *Fervent Years*, right, right. So, what we did... I've lost track of my thought. What were we talking about?

**David:** Your theatrical background and establishing a company and a space.

**Charles:** Right. So, the first thing we wanted to do when we started the Open Space was to have a company. We couldn't actually do that because we didn't have enough money and we didn't get enough prestige to actually get the money. So we, the most we really could do was bring together a nucleus of about seven actors who we would use over and over again, so that we're like a company but they weren't officially a company, in the sense that you had the Old Vic or the RSC or we had a group of people who were on salary and always there and going from one show to the other. We were so small-scale and so poor that we had to forgo that but it was always my idea, was you say to actually create that group theatre style, a theatre in which the actors interacted with each other, the same actors interacted with each other on



different kinds of material, because the thing that happens in a situation like that is it throws up a kind of knowledge and spirit that togetherness, what you can't get in an ad hoc commercial production.

**David:** So the continuity of having a group of artists together over a long period of time makes certain kinds of work possible that wouldn't otherwise be able to be generated.

**Charles:** I wouldn't put it that way. I would say that it still allows other things to be done, but it's done by an ad hoc group, in other words you have to bring in different people who have not been the same people who've been weaned on what you've done before. It was all a matter of money... We couldn't afford a proper company.

**David:** That was a problem with the Group Theatre as well. It was a huge source of tension I think. And, to mention the German theatre, public subsidy in the German theatre is so much better than in Britain or in the United States. I wonder if it's a reoccurring problem in the United States and in Britain, that you can't establish these kinds of groups in the same way.

**Charles:** Well, you have it to a certain extent with the RSC and the National Theatre, and in Europe, of course, it's that you sign up for a three- or four-year contract and you're there with other people who all sign up as well. And so it creates a certain togetherness which would never have been there if you didn't have these people playing with each other over different kinds of styles and different kinds of plays. It's something that is economically difficult to achieve. And so, when you talk about it, if you talk about it to producers or managers or people who want to invest, they don't see the value of it. They look at it in financial terms.

**David:** It's kind of an ethos that you're trying to generate, is that correct?

**Charles:** Well, more like a knowledge that actors have with other actors, which gives them a foundation for the changes they have to make in a particular play or production. In other words they get to know each other on a social and philosophic and aesthetic level, and then all of those things are applied to the material and when they are it produces a better effect. But economics are completely against that. You can't afford twelve people, being on salary all the time. That was one of the knockdowns we had. Then we tried something else with a shifting group of people coming in and out. But that also needed additional money. So we were... I mean, English theatre looked at us, if it looked at us at all, as an alternative to the West End and as a sort of an experimental theatre. And to a certain extent we were that, but we could have done very much better had we had more subsidy.

**David:** You described in *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic* a kind of almost like trench warfare with the kind of establishment. And... you've had exchanges with Harold Hobson, and also Kenneth Tynan, and I wonder if you saw that as part of some... as individual conflict with another person or personality, or was it some sort of reaction against what they represented?

**Charles:** Well I think it was two things. One, it was very much a matter of certain critics and certain people in the theatre, to feel that they were in another world from where we were. And so it became, we weren't sure what they were looking for, but we knew that we couldn't achieve it. But, now what was the first point you mentioned just there about the...?

**David:** Well, I remember in the *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic* you refer to a kind of... it's described as a kind of trench warfare that you were hurling projectiles and it was really like a war on the establishment or the theatre establishment? And, I remember in your own personal experience you had these exchanges with Harold Hobson, because he claimed that the Open Space was not actually experimental and so you guys exchanged letters and so on, and with Tynan.

**Charles:** Yes, that's absolutely true that it wasn't experimental. When we found good, interesting, experimental plays, we put them on. But the work that interested me the most was in fact the experimental work, so that was the majority of things that we did. But when we found a good play, or what we thought was a good play, we mounted it in, you know, the traditional way. So it was a mix. But maybe that was a mistake, because an audience likes to know where they're at in a particular theatrical scheme. If they go to see the European theatres they're wanting to get a certain experience. If they go to a sort of a West End house, they want a different experience. So the thing to do is to try and bring together the new public, the people who are more open eyed to experimentation and to experimental, and to use them in such a way that we wean a new taste into them for a different kind of thing. The most hazardous thing we did were the Happenings, because they were not really in any sense theatre-based. Of course they were theatre pieces, but there wasn't text or traditional ways of going about it. And I found that when we did *Adversion* a lot of people liked it who initially thought that they were going to dislike it and resented it being there. Because the way it would work is people would come to the theatre with their tickets and they'd go into the auditorium and they'd find there's no chairs there and they were huddled together in a group, they went through the back door, through a sort of step ladders and things, and during the course of their trek, trip, through the streets we had prepared certain activities for them to encounter. That went on for about I'd guess about an hour and a half and then at the end of that we trooped them all back in to the theatre and had a discussion about what they felt. It was mixed. Some people thought I've seen things that I never was aware of before, and other people would say I was buying a ticket, I want to have a seat and sit down and you know, have an interval and I didn't expect, didn't expect what you presented. But every Happening faced that because no matter how many Happenings you did, they were things that a traditional audience, which was a majority, sloughed off, they just thought that this is not for us.

**David:** Are they frightened it's participatory, the Happening. The audience is intermingled, and what's happening? Were they frightened off by that?

**Charles:** I think that in some instances they were, because there is usually a gulf between the audience and the stage, and of course with the theatre work we did and very much like what was done by the group in America, but...

**David:** It was John Cage of Black Mountain College who started the Happenings and then Allan Kaprow in New York? But there are groups like the Wooster Group I think they...

**Charles:** It's just that very famous group that had trouble with the politics and brought it ...

**David:** Oh, the Living Theatre.

**Charles:** The Living Theatre, yeah. We were pretty much in the same boat. We did the same kinds of things, on different subject matter. And that eventually created an audience, usually

among younger people. We managed to get together people who were in their teens and early twenties and thirties, and they came and they supported the work, obviously because they got something out of it. So that was the beginning of the cracks. Those cracks were permanent. It's what maybe changed the British theatre during the sixties and seventies, not so radically that the other plays and musicals could never work again in a traditional way, because they're always there. There's always a Broadway in the English theatre, the West End and all that. But the people who were trying to make some experiments with the material, it was a different kind of world. And I mean the people who we spoke to, and we played to, were people who went on to other things and all that kind of stuff.

**David:** Okay, so the Terrance Rattigan centenary is taking place and there's been a kind of reassessment of this idea or criticism of Terrance Rattigan and some of the pre-war generation of playwrights, like Noel Coward and Agatha Christie. In books like Dan Rebellato's *1956 and all that*, he argues that a lot of the criticism of these playwrights was inflated and was used as a way of gaining traction and momentum for the generation of angry young men and the new generation of post-war playwrights. So the reassessing Terrance Rattigan and company, and I was just curious what's your reaction to that? Was Terrance Rattigan that despicable or...

**Charles:** No, I think it was a class reaction. I mean the audience that were drawn to things like that was usually an older audience and a more conservative audience. So, those plays, because those audiences exist and have existed for centuries, the managements play to that. I mean they revive Terrance Rattigan, and they revive John Osborne. It's crazy to think about reviving John Osborne, I mean he was there as a forerunner of this, of our time. But I think they, I think the fact that in the theatre... There has always been this dichotomy between commercial and the non-commercial theatre. And the commercial theatre, there are plays that are worth reviving. Terrance Rattigan wrote some of them. There's no question that Noel Coward did, and one gets a kick out of seeing those plays performed in a traditional way, because they are plays for the time they were created, and they still have a shelf-life, people are still able to appreciate them. So, it was never a matter of saying we wanted to completely destroy the whole of the traditional theatre and replace it with Happenings, with experiments, with Artaud, that was never the intention. Because we knew that we were a small scale operation, and the West End was a big situation, which had all the financing and all the PR and that. So we thought of ourselves as being on the same terrain of material but on a very much shorter part of it.

**David:** You mention in our email exchange that to properly rehearse an Artaud-inspired project, it requires a three month period. I was just curious why that is. Why does it require three months?

**Charles:** Well the reason it requires three months is to do with what we were just talking about. If you have a period of that length of time to prepare the work an ensemble is able to be born which is peculiar to that particular production. And you very often find that in theatres that when actors come together into a play that many of them are from different kinds of disciplines, they have different views, different preferences, and that's all fine. But there is a through-line in most plays that has to be found and then performed, presented. And in order to do that you have to have solid interplay between the actors. It goes back to having a group theatre, having a permanent theatre. Any company that doesn't have a permanent theatre seems to me open to many more of the vagaries than the ones that do. And more and more it seems to be, up until the recession there was a lot of money being thrown at the great

regional theatres in America anyway, to have such a theatre was a fixture of what was actually to go on with the actors. But, you're basically bouncing off a commercial theatre with a non-commercial theatre because whatever words are used to describe the experimental Happenings and all of that it comes down to the fact that there was an audience for that, it was younger, it had to pay less money for tickets, and I don't know what state it's in now, but it was certainly a mine well during the sixties and seventies. At the end of the seventies, it seemed to me to be at the end of a period, of an era. Because it was Margaret Thatcher who withdrew money from many of the theatres, and they had difficult situations similar to what's happening now because of the recession. So everybody takes it for granted that because of the recession and we can't do that sort of hiring, we can't do a play with more than six or seven characters, ...[unclear]... the scene here in London. In our city, and that's Los Angeles, it is that if you submit a play to a reader that has, let's say, ten or twelve actors in it, it never gets read, it's out of consideration. If it's got like five or six or two, they'll consider it. But they haven't got the money I suppose to engage a cast of theatre actors in what is an economic situation which is like quicksand, you know where people are being pulled down on every side.

**David:** I'm just curious, I won't keep you too long, but just to wrap things up, I'm curious what you think the influence of new media may have on experimental theatre or on certain kinds of theatre. For example, there is this theory that political theatre will be really rendered out of date because if you want to make a political statement nowadays, it's a lot easier and less expensive to just make a video and put it on Youtube or put it on the internet, as opposed to you know a Brecht sort of production, where you would go to a factory and schools and tour around. You'll actually reach a greater number of people and have a greater impact using new media, and I was just curious what you...

**Charles:** Well I guess it's a symptom of my period, my age, and what I was brought up with, but I find that the intrusion of electronics, like the *Spiderman* thing doing good business but...

**David:** My friend is an understudy in that.

**Charles:** Well, you know the history of that. And you go into a Los Vegas theatre to see a play, and you get a a high-tech...

**David:** spectacle

**Charles:** Spectacle, right. And that's where the theatre started, with spectacles like that. And I don't think that it's easy or desirable to assimilate all of the technical discoveries that were dealt with in the recent years, because, I mean they all say it used to be, theatre is two planks and a passion. And I think that for me is still the way one would like to proceed. You'd do as much as you can in order to refine the play, the players, what you're going after and then you put it on stage. But if at the same time you have to worry about monitors and people flying in the air on some sort of technical board thing, I'm old fashioned enough to say that I'm not interested in that theatre and how appreciative of how certain audiences are of them. Because theatre, it asks the person who goes to the theatre to be in some way impressed by the same sort of technology that impresses most people in the present day, everybody is... the most interesting things that are going on in terms of films are all these different options that people are taking, and the picture that came out very recently about the kid who was a billionaire, remember that one?

**David:** *Richie Rich*, these sorts of kids movies or was it a serious movie?

**Charles:** Yeah, it was about the creation of Facebook.

**David:** Oh yes, *The Social Network*.

**Charles:** *The Social Network*, yeah. The danger of the social networking, is that it's too open-ended. You don't get definitive things unless you are interacting with a person you know or have known for a long time. But it pushes you into superficial relationships with a lot of people and I think the technological advances I personally find anathema. I don't think that they actually do anything like what a really good group of actors can produce in a very simple situation. Because it's not about pushing buttons, and having things flying in the air, that's not about it. And I think, when I think back to it, the parallel to that was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when everybody was concerned with putting scenery on the stage. They would do Shakespeare with the real settings of Greek times, for the Romans they'd have a lot of business, they'd have chariots coming in and, it was a kind of low-brow version of what we have in a streamlined way, which is the work of the computers combining itself with the theatre. But as I say all these things I can hear myself feeling that I'm old-fashioned, that one prefers a different kind of theatre. But it may just be a personal prejudice on my part.

**David:** I've found it surprising because a lot of the theatre that was going on in Britain and in alternative fringe theatre was participatory and it was anti-hierarchical and the whole idea of the Arts Lab and people, it was an unconventional place where people would sit on mats and so on as opposed to a West End theatre, which was very hierarchical and so on. And, some of the aspects of social media really chime with that I think, it really... facilitates participatory democracy, and is anti-hierarchical. But it also is dehumanising and very synthetic the way people interact.

**Charles:** I think the perfect example of that is, I have a problem remembering it...

**David:** *The Social Network*.

**Charles:** No, not that one, but the one where you go... with the glasses.

**David:** Oh, *Avatar*.

**Charles:** *Avatar*. I mean for most people that's sort of a great experience, but for me it was a yawn, because it was just technology. You couldn't talk about performances. From my standpoint you couldn't talk about themes etcetera, so the basic story behind, about people coming in and taking over another people, but that kind of stuff seems to be to me the antithesis of what theatre is all about. And the reason it is that way is because people now trust in mechanical objects, there have been so many inventions, with the internet and all the other things. They actually are rollicking in these inventions and you now know, you probably do, that if you have a film you want to see, you can see it on your ipod or whatever it's called. And if you want to see it, and it's already in existence, you can click it on. All of that seems to be accepting the performance art the way it is now, rather than saying what is the aesthetic advantage of these things, if they call into question the hierarchy of technology and things like that. So, as again, I feel myself saying I'm out of the normal sync of what's going on here.

**David:** Did you agree with Marshall McLuhan? What did you think of his theories and his writing?

**Charles:** I've always found them interesting and provocative, and I thought he was a great observer of this kind of stuff, and a lot of it can be attributed back to him. But then again, he didn't have the paraphernalia that somebody like, what's the name of that guy who did *Avatar*?

**David:** James Cameron?

**Charles:** James Cameron, right.

**David:** I remember he came to see a play at Malibu Stage Company.

**Charles:** I think he did, I think he did. And now, apparently, he's working on another... film that's similar to, what did you call that thing?

**David:** *Avatar*?

**Charles:** Yeah. He's doing a sort of *Son of Avatar*, but he's crazy about the glasses, and it is probably mind-blowing technical advances if you look at them just in terms of the electronic side. But I didn't find, I couldn't get interested in *Avatar*, because I could see exactly what I was being presented by the makers of the film to see. Whereas in a real play production, you don't think about the people who are putting it together, you are consumed by the activities of the actors and the material. And the material is really much more traditional and has dialogue and they had people up on the stage you could identify with because they're like you in some way or another or you know people like that. So, again...

**David:** It seems it's about ideas. Theatre is about ideas as opposed to escapism and spectacle, or something like *Avatar*. It's kind of mindless, people go and escape. Whereas, the theatre can be a forum for the exchanging ideas and questions and so on.

**Charles:** Right. That's why you very often have people in the performances stay on at the end in order to discuss what's just happened. You couldn't even dream about doing that with the film the other night, because it's a personalised experience because of the people in the audience. But it's a ropery topic because, you're interested in, have I got this right, you're interested in the earlier stuff, the Sixties and Seventies.

**David:** Yes, really your London period. You came and you moved to London in Fifty-Six, right? The summer of 1956?

**Charles:** Yes, that's right. I went to LAMDA in 56.

**David:** And you were in London until 1980. Correct?

**Charles:** That is correct. Where did you get that information from?

**David:** I've been reading all of your work.

**Charles:** I see, I see. Yeah. You did get the *Burnt Bridges*?

**David:** Yes, I have that.

**Charles:** A lot of these things turned up, a lot of the issues we're talking about turned up in that book, and I, like everybody else in the world, I'm writing a memoir now in order to try and catch up with what happened since the beginning of the English period. Which is very hard to do, but I'm going to try to... as long as I can recollect it, I going to try and put it down. It's not for other people that read it, but for my own sake.

**David:** That sounds very interesting. I remember you were involved in the controversies that had to do with censorship, like the *Doctor Faustus* production in Glasgow? Where you represented Sloth as the Queen Elizabeth the Second.

**Charles:** Yes, and all the other sinners, all the other of the seven sinners, were also represented by different heads of state. So it wasn't that we singled out the British Queen for any kind of derision, it was that we wanted to try and make a point about the nature of what Faustus was doing and how it paralleled with things that were happening off the stage. But....

**David:** There was also the incident with the Andy Warhol or Paul Morrissey film, *Flesh*, where you guys were raided by dozens of police constables?

**Charles:** That's right, that's right. That was a period where the economics were the most pertinent of it.

**David:** The future Prime Minister, James Callaghan actually the Home Secretary at the time, and there was a debate in the House of Commons about the incident.

**Charles:** But the MP who got behind us, Michael something or other, I can't remember his name, felt that this was a complete incursion into the freedom of what we were doing in the theatre. And the irony is, when we wanted to do the Andy Warhol film, when we actually did the Andy Warhol film, it was because our budget had been dissipated and we were really...

**David:** It was a good moneymaker.

**Charles:** Yeah, we were very broke, and Thelma interested this guy in this Andy Warhol film, and within weeks, within even ten days, we were flourishing financially. I mean everybody, it was a funny audience, a weirdo audience, but there was a hell of a lot of them, which is a sort of funny take on the British public, which you can't sell many people wanting to sneak into see a blow-job or nudity or whatever was going on in that busy little film. And they came and put Thelma, who was a great partner to work with...

**David:** Do you still communicate?

**Charles:** Yeah, we communicate on a regular basis. She's trying now to raise the money to put on a production that we did at the Open Space, the Oscar Wilde play, the...

**David:** *Wilde West*.

**Charles:** No, not *Wilde West*. The one about the criticism... that he wrote about...

**David:** Oh, *The Critic as Artist*... *The Critic as Artist*.

**Charles:** *The Critic as Artist*. We did a production of *The Critic as Artist* at the Open Space, and it was set in the Victorian period, and everything about it, everything on stage, was traditional, but you had to see it through a gauze, so that the gauze went from one side of the theatre, of the audience, all the way around. It's the equivalent of this guy giving you 3D glasses, because it means that you're looking in on something that is further away that it seems to be. Of course the Oscar Wilde is a lunatic thing to try to do as a play because there's a minimal amount of action between these two characters, and a maximum amount of just rhetoric from Oscar Wilde, which is fascinating to read, and I think it's fascinating to hear it read, but we do... I can't remember where we were.

**David:** How did you do that, because it wasn't originally intended as a piece of dramatic writing. There's no...

**Charles:** Well, I adapted it. I took the play and adapted it for our purposes. I cut it and put in a tension between the boy and the Wilde character, so in our production it was about Oscar Wilde using his intellect and his genius to try to seduce this particular boy. Whereas if you read *The Critic as Artist* straight through it's a polemic on criticism and artistry, and I had to find a way, I wanted to find a way to dramatise it, to give it a story behind...

**David:** There must be some kind of conflict or some kind of struggle.

**Charles:** Something has to be wanted and received, and in the case of *The Critic as Artist*, you knew from the beginning of the middle of the first part that he was, the Wilde character was trying to put a fix on this younger boy who had come to him because he was a disciple, and that still allows you to present the Wilde material but it also opens the possibility of interacting with the boy in a certain naturalistic way, which you let the audience know what is going on underneath. And there was no question about it because it ended with a kiss between Wilde and the boy, which was not in any way rejected by the boy, so he's been won over by the intellect of Oscar Wilde, and now he's in a sense paying for what he got by giving... which was roughly based on the character of Oscar Wilde's lover, I can't remember his name, but it was Alfred something.

**David:** It will come to me as we're, as soon as I'm not trying to remember. Just finally, I was going to ask you about... the controversies you were involved in created enormous amounts of publicity, and I was wondering if that was a deliberate strategy that you were involved in a number of controversies that created enormous amount of free attention and was that a deliberate strategy on your part, to provoke controversy, to... ?

**Charles:** There were only two outstanding ones that I can think of. One was that we were doing *Sherlock's Last Case*, the first version of it. I was in Harrods, one of the big department stores in England.

**David:** You watched the make-up display.

**Charles:** I watched the make-up being done, but it was all women because it was about lipstick and cosmetics and all that and I thought maybe this material can actually melt the rinds and skin you have and kept replacing it with something else, and I thought if I could,



maybe that I could do that in the play. But I was in the midst of a group of women, who were interested in that kind of stuff, the only male there, and the store detective thought I was there in order to pick pockets, or to get money, to steal money from the women or something like that. So they put me into one of these cars... no, I went out of the department store after I'd realised there was nothing in there that helped me with *Sherlock's Last Case*, and as I walked out on Oxford Street a police car drove up, put me in handcuffs and put me in the backseat. I said, what's going on? You know, what's happening? He said, we feel that you're there in order to steal or take off with people's pocket books or wallets or something absolutely preposterous. But I can see where they'd be a little bit stuck by the fact that here was a big group of women listening to someone talk about cosmetics, and here's a guy in the midst of it all, so I can understand why the store detective was suspicious of me. But the case was thrown out, it was never actually... there was no case to be made.

**David:** I was thinking of checking, because under the Freedom of Information Act, do the Metropolitan Police have a file on you or, because there was the situation with the Andy Warhol film, there was that situation, there was also the... the Happening in Edinburgh created a great controversy, and they were monitoring a lot of people. Like Richard Demarco, they had a file on Richard Demarco. How do you feel about that, if I were to check and see if there was a police file?

**Charles:** I would imagine there is a police file because we did these things, and they were considered to be subversive.

**David:** Yes, they would have seen you as a subversive intellectual.

**Charles:** Right, and the fact that I was American was in some way also a mark against me, bringing American ways of subversion into the country. But there are only three major ones. The Andy Warhol one, as I say, was done strictly for commercial purposes, because we were broke and we needed the money. The other one, what was the other one?

**David:** The Glasgow, with the *Doctor Faustus*, and then the Happening. But you're saying it was not a deliberate strategy to garner free publicity, to provoke controversy.

**Charles:** They said, the group that was there at the conference asked us, the American contingent, to give us a sample of Happenings because they'd never seen one. And the thing that deteriorated madly were things going on in that conference. Because it was being televised, you got mad people like Martin ...

**David:** Esslin?

**Charles:** Esslin, in a sense posturing for the film, and other directors and actresses being [unclear] but actually performing, because they were being shocked by the film. So, we were, the group of us, the Americans, we were very disappointed with that, we thought this is not really productive in terms of what we're doing here, and ... when we decided to make the Happening the underlying idea behind it was that there was criticism of what was going on in the conference, there was a lot of hot air. There were elements of it that was a little bit striking. There was a nude who was on a kind of a wheeled platform.

**David:** That's what all the publicity focused on, although it was actually a very small part of the Happening.

**Charles:** Very small. It was just that she went across she was pushed from one part of the stage to the other. But there were other things in there that were also provocative. One of the actresses, again I can't remember the names so well, she played a baby...

**David:** A Tennessee Williams baby, *Baby Doll*?

**Charles:** *Baby Doll*, yeah. I can't remember her name. But she... one of the pieces was that she went onto the stage and the people came together and chased her through the auditorium... because she was subversive to what was going on ... There were other things, what else was there.

**David:** The Queen's cousin was there.

**Charles:** Yes I guess he was. Let's see. There was the Andy Warhol thing, which we discussed. There was the thing at the Happening. We were a very small part of it. It was mostly Martin Esslin, and actors and directors of renown. Olivier was there and all the rest of it. So we were small fish. But it created a big splash. Oh yes, the *Doctor Faustus*. It was a similar situation. When we got to the seven deadly sins, I gave the characters the masks of particular politicians of the period, which sort of represented the evil of the seven deadly sins. And the guy who ran the theatre in Glasgow saw a dress rehearsal it and said you can't take, you can't have that scene where you have the Queen, with the crown, being part of this conspiracy. And I said well she's there with a lot of other people, people of other countries. So what's the problem? It's obviously just a theatrical moment. It's not saying anything about the Queen. But in his mind it was saying something about the Queen. So, he said we're cancelling the performance. So, we were there the night before it was supposed to open.

**David:** Well, he gave you an option, right? He wanted to have six deadly sins, he wanted to remove Sloth, one of the deadly sins, and you refused, if I remember correctly.

**Charles:** The compromise we made was a ridiculous one. Which is instead of having a large thing around her head, she had a tiara, not the thing you'd expect her to have. That became okay with the committee, the fact that it blurred the fact that this was Queen Elizabeth. But I mean, it was close enough in costume for an audience to realise that it was the Queen. But again, we were not mocking the Queen. We were trying to do something with a standard piece of the Faust play, which would be theatrically relevant to what was going on. We had other people, the sins were Mugabe [sic] from South Africa and places like that, where there had been apartheid and that kind of thing. So there was an element of that in it. But I guess when you grow up with that kind of stuff, I mean those were in the formative years, and when one looks back at them, they were more than anything else a lot of fun. They were being provocative, in some cases without knowing it. You just thought, well this is my take on it, and then you suddenly found that 100% of the audience disliked your take. Which is the way controversy begins. And then of course when it gets into the papers, it turns into some kind of other thing, in which people now want to go and see it because it's got nudity or because it's got something ... It's selling out now, despite of the fact that everybody knows what's happened with that part of it... Just answering, when you're talking about the publicity that we had, there were things like that, and then there was an article that I wrote for the *Guardian*, in which I pointed out to them that all the members of the Arts Council, the theatre Arts Council committee were people who ran theatres and were giving money to themselves. We had a very little grant from them, and the object of the article was to point out that all the,

literally, all of the people were giving money to themselves. They were voting money to themselves. And they were very conscious of it, because one of the people who ran the children's theatre said, well, if we're going to discuss money now for the companies, I'll go outside. So she goes out to the hall.

**David:** What year was this, the article?

**Charles:** Oh, I guess it would be 1970 something, I'm not good at numbers. But when she came back, she had her subsidy as well. I mean, it was all palsy-walsy, people knew each other dividing up money, and honestly dividing up money so it went to the major regional theatres and not to places like the Open Space. So, but there were not too many scandals. The ones you mentioned I certainly recall, but don't know [unclear]. I remember one thing that could have been a scandal, which is I was very angry with something that happened in the auditorium at the Open Space, and the girl that was trying to placate me, and I was very angry and walked out, and she followed me out onto the street, and we kept up the argument. And on the street was the fire thing, that you push the lever when there's a fire, and I out of anger pushed the thing down so that a siren went off. And before we knew it, before we could actually go back, there was a fire truck coming down Tottenham Court Road, and I said we better duck, we have nothing. We'll never get out of this one, there is no excuse. So we went back into the theatre, and when they came into the theatre, we said there's been some kids maybe, so we had an interesting... it was a very interesting period of one's life. Because the people there, Thelma was a great partner to work with and a lot of the actors that we... I see them now on television the actors who I worked with, on this series about the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Upstairs Downstairs*. I've come across three actors who were with us at the Open Space, so they're obviously doing well, some of them are doing well and are still there. But as time goes by it will all fade away.

**David:** There were other pranks and high-jinks too, right? You guys, I remember in *Burnt Bridges* you described going into Guys Hospital and you took a potted plant down and put it on stage just before a performance.

**Charles:** No we actually, me and Leslie, one of the girls there. Thelma was in the play by Paul Ableman I think it was. And she said to me, the girl, why didn't you get some flowers for the girl. And I said, oh gee, I forgot all about that, maybe I can find something. I went into the hospital to make the call and I saw this potted plant, and I stole it. I picked it up and took it with us and brought it to the theatre and by the time the curtain call was taking place, everybody stepped forward and she then stepped forward. And we went over there with the potted plant and plopped it in front of her, and she was very angry about that, but she eventually saw the humour in it.

**David:** That's very interesting. And thank you again, I really appreciate your time.

**Charles:** What are you trying to do exactly? I couldn't figure out what your major thrust is at the moment.

**David:** Right, so my title is 'American influence on the advent of the alternative theatre movement in Britain' and I'm focusing on 1956-1980. So many of the commentaries on alternative theatre in Britain or post-war British theatre, tend to refer to the influence of the French, of Ionesco and Genet and Beckett and so on, and also the influence of Brecht, and also indigenous groups, like Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl and so on. But I believe that

one of the key influences was also American work that was going on, and that was the kind of experimental theatre practices that were developed in Greenwich Village and in the East Village in the 1950s and the 1960s with the La MaMa and the Open Theatre and the Living Theatre. And places like Café Cino and Judson Poets Theatre, and that influence has not really been examined or really properly identified. So essentially what I'm doing is I'm taking some of the key concepts that Baz Kershaw developed in his writing on Welfare State and on the alternative theatre, and I'm applying his key concepts to an area that has really not been fully examined. So that is really the idea behind the project.

**Charles:** Does that in some way kind of duplicate what the book is about?

**David:** Well this book essentially follows Thelma Holt's early career from the Open Space to the Roundhouse, and she describes how the Open Space and the Roundhouse were a part of the beginnings of this phase of the alternative theatre in Britain, and so there are similarities and so on. But it's not exactly the same. And I actually go back because the Unity Theatre, their first production was *Waiting for Lefty*, and the first half dozen productions that Unity Theatre did back in the late 1930s were all American plays from the Group Theatre, that they picked up from the taxi driver plays, that they picked up from American theatre magazines. And so in terms of talking about the alternative theatre movement, that's really where I start, and the American influence on that. Really it's the life span of the Unity Theatre, which I think lasted until 1978.

**Charles:** Saying you mentioned that, because when I first got to England in 1956, I had heard of this theatre that was run by poets, the poetry theatre where, what's his name, the very famous, not [unclear] but the other guy. Anyway, it was run by, it was, they did poetic plays, plays of poetry, and I wanted to find out more about them, and I went to the Unity Theatre by mistake, thinking that was the theatre where everything was going on, and was completely perplexed by what was going on there, because they asked me to do *Marriage by Gogol*, which I did. And shortly after I came over there, and all through the course of that rehearsal period, things were going on that I couldn't fathom. People talking about 'the line'. What about the line? We can't do this because it's about keeping with the line. And at a certain point I said to somebody, what the hell is this line business? Well, that's the party line laid down by the Soviet, I said...

**David:** This is at the Unity Theatre?

**Charles:** Yeah, I think I said the Unity Theatre.

**David:** Because they, there was the Red Megaphones. They were the doctrinaire Marxist Soviet theatre company, and the Unity theatre was a kind of separate group that became more successful and was a little bit less doctrinaire, as I understand it.

**Charles:** It was mainly gifted amateurs, practically no professional theatre.

**David:** Well, there was Paul Robeson, and Paul Robeson gave up a lucrative West End role to perform anonymously with the Unity Theatre.

**Charles:** I didn't know that, what was he doing? What film or play was he doing?

**David:** I don't remember off hand, I'll email you the information, because I have *The Story of Unity Theatre* at home. I don't remember off-hand.

**Charles:** Right. That would be a really interesting thing to write about because the Unity Theatre, as you say, was out in its own little island, nobody else was doing any... except this other company that worked with poetry. I called up Ernie [unclear] who I know through a friend of mine, and I said can you tell me the name of that group that was doing... Christopher Fry was part of it but it was all poetry and all that. They gave me a name, I can't remember it now. The dichotomy was very clear there, that you didn't have an Off-West End stage situation, you had the Unity, you had that poetry group, and I don't know if there was much more. I can't remember the year in which we started the British Drama League, but that was before the onrush of the theatre, would have been 1950 something or other.

**David:** And you were at the start of it. The work with the British Drama League, it was like 1958 or 1959.

**Charles:** Yes, it was something like that. Right. It is very hard to retrieve all of this.

**David:** Well, I'm curious because you were at the heart of all of this, and you grew up in Greenwich Village, correct? And you watched the, you went and saw the Open Theatre and Living Theatre very early on, in the 1950s. Did you see a carryover of the kind of practices that were being developed into Britain later on, or is that not accurate?

**Charles:** No, I think that's accurate. But I think we boil down to one major influence that maybe we haven't actually talked about, which is the arrival of the Method in the English theatre. Because the union... the... what was the theatre?

**David:** Unity Theatre.

**Charles:** The Unity Theatre worked very much along Method lines, as did Joan Littlewood and her company. And then eventually when I was finished with school, and I had no money and no job, I started a workshop teaching people about the American Method, and there were a great number of people who were interested in that. Not only from my studio, but from two or three others, and it sprung up at the same time and eventually the Stanislavski thinking, and idea of improvisation and through lines and all that got through to people, like Laurence Olivier and the play that he did with, oh I can't remember....

**David:** *Rhinoceros*, or ...

**Charles:** No, it wasn't, it was a period play. I can't remember the name of the other guy.

**David:** Ralph Richardson in *A School of Scandal* perhaps?

**Charles:** No, it was, the guy who ran... the Unity Theatre... what the hell was his name? I can't remember, I never remember. But the point I was trying to make is that one of the things that really shook up the scene during that period was the acceptance of the arrival of Stanislavski's techniques, and then eventually branched out in a small way to Michael Chekhov's techniques, but it was still part and parcel of the Stanislavski discoveries. So, if you're thinking about the dominant features that were actually there to make the change. The arrival of the Actors Studio and Stanislavski is a very large factor there. And it was people

like the lead of *Look Back in Anger* who acknowledged openly that he was working according to the Stanislavski period and the play that Olivier did at the National was directed by..

**David:** Tony Richardson?

**Charles:** No, he was there, he was a director there for a while.

**David:** Bill Gaskill?

**Charles:** Bill Gaskill, that's right. Bill Gaskill. And Bill Gaskill suggested, one rehearsal he suggested to the company, can we try now to do this scene in an improvised way and everyone doing improvisation rather than from the text. And then everyone looks to Olivier, to see whether that would be acceptable or not, and you could see that he was really churned up by it. Then ultimately he said, all right if that's what you think will work, we'll try it. So it, in a sense, was forced on to Olivier during that production, but it never really stuck because those actors didn't stay very long there. It was a period of where you signed up for a two- or three-year period, not go on for decades like you do in Europe. But just to go back to what the influence of that period, you have to take into account the influence of Stanislavski because it really did influence many of the plays that followed. It had working-class characters, they went in for improvisation, they knew about objectives and all of the paraphernalia of the Method.

**David:** It seems that Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl were very influenced by Brecht.

**Charles:** Yes, they were very influenced by Brecht. Yeah, they were. But the way she worked was a very collective style. What you get is sort of Stanislavski-like. She went through a funny kind of process, because when she started she was very much in the hinterlands, and then when she succeeded with a West End musical, she didn't really go back to, she didn't really continue with musicals, nor did she go back to the things she did before. She went off in another direction entirely.

**David:** And Ewan MacColl kind of split off and did things separately.

**Charles:** Yeah, there was a break up there.

**David:** I remember, I think it was in that book *The Other Way*, where you write this conversation between Brecht, Stanislavski and Artaud, and then you write yourself into the conversation and you actually enter the scene. It's very interesting.

## Appendix Five

### Jim Haynes Interview

9 August 2011

West London

**David Weinberg:** OK. This is David Weinberg. It's the 9th of August, 2011. I'm here with Jim Haynes in West London. Thanks a lot, Jim, for agreeing to help me and participate and have a little chat. You have been at the centre of so many significant developments in terms of avant-garde theatre and alternative theatre and avant-garde art. It seems that you have been in the right place at the right time, many times. I'm just curious if you agree and if so why that is? Is it intuition or is it by design?

**Jim Haynes:** Design, luck. [laughs]

**David:** Is it your enthusiasm?

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** Yeah it's my enthusiasm for life and making things happen around me. I loved Edinburgh when I arrived in '56 as a US service man doing his military obligation, and I said I'd like to have permanent night duty and permission to live off-base and do at the university what I am doing today. Then when I got demobbed – sometimes I use British terms – from the American service, I got permission from the British and American governments to stay on in Edinburgh.

So suddenly I ended up in Edinburgh with no income. The only thing I could do: at the time I was wise enough, somehow to realise that starting a business required no work permit. So I started a book shop and then probably the struggle to start a book shop. Then the book shop became a gallery and a performance space as well. I date the start of the Traverse Theatre from my first performance at the book shop.

**David:** Which was the Hume?

**Jim:** The Hume dialogue from 1960. Then later we did productions often in the book shop and then finally we decided to start a theatre in Edinburgh. The first place I found was at 369 High Street. We had a production from the Festival in '61 there but we ended up with a fellow who was doing a partnership on a new place, verbal partnership nothing legal just handshakes.

My lawyer said if you don't get out of this deal, you are going to lose the bookshop and everything else. I had to after putting an incredible amount of energy into creating this new place. I had to give it up to salvage the bookshop. Then not going into the complications, I found the spot that was the original Traverse.

**David:** You've written that Harold Hobson was very supportive and came to a lot of productions. I'm just curious about this.

**Jim:** He came to the Hume production. He raved in the August 1960 *Sunday Times* about the Festival. That was special. The smallest tiny bookshop with sixty to seventy-five people maximum, max. We served coffee and threw it open to discussion.

**David:** It seems that you tapped into the sort of zeitgeist of the time. That it was this vein of material you were able to tap into.

**Jim:** Well I decided with the theatre, I mean this is not an original idea to me. I mean many people have said it before. Theatre should, should reflect the surrounding community. The angst and aspirations of the local writers. There were very few spots when the Traverse started and I decided to start a writers' theatre and only do premieres, and which I can probably say that almost fifty years later they're still doing.

**David:** Scotland at the time seemed to be a very repressed society. You have now moved permanently to Paris. Peter Brook is now based permanently in Paris. At one point Marowitz had written in Britain there is a shallowness of soil which threatens the existence of any serious artistic enterprise and he was actually seriously considering having the RSC Experimental Group in Paris. And Marowitz has also said that he had a profound dissatisfaction with the British theatre. I was wondering, you've also moved to Paris. Is there something about Britain, about the mentality here?

**Jim:** No, not for me. Mine was just the evolution of my life. I got invited...I did some favours for some young French professors, which basically involved looking after about forty students in Edinburgh. They would come to the theatre and hear lectures on contemporary British theatre. I did it for about four or five years in Edinburgh and then when we shifted to London – they said, can we shift it to London and I said of course. I can make theatre in London.

Then, after May '68 which began...May '68 began at Nanterre University and it began over students upset with small classrooms, crowded classrooms, boring professors, irrelevant subjects, et cetera, et cetera. So later these guys, these three or four guys, these professors would ask me for help over the years with permission from the Ministry of Education to start a new university.

They picked up the phone and said you have got to be a professor. I said, that's very kind of you but I could probably do kindergarten, maybe, but I don't think I can do a university. My French is abominable.

**David:** They said you could do it in English. You're good with languages. You speak Russian.

**Jim:** [laughs] I have rudimentary Russian.

**David:** There were a number of American expatriates like yourself and Marowitz, who was also on the GI Bill when he came to L.A.M.D.A., and there was your friend, Jack Henry Moore. There was Ed Berman later on and Nancy Meckler who worked at the Arts Lab. I'm just curious if there was any kind of sense of community or...

**Jim:** We all knew each other and we were all basically supportive and friendly with each other. Jack Henry Moore had gone to Dublin as a private detective. He had been on Broadway as a stage manager or assistant stage manager or something on a Broadway show.

He had gone to the Boston home of somebody else on the staff for a weekend or something and the mother, over lunch, said to her son, 'Who are we going to get to run our agency in Dublin? The guy's leaving and we need to...' and Jack did it. He got sent to Dublin.



He came to Edinburgh because he'd read an article in the *Sunday Observer* about my desire to stage an English language premiere of the Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht musical *Happy End* which had never been done in English. After he'd read that and he was a Kurt Weill, Bertolt Brecht fan and scholar and that's how and why he came to Edinburgh. I asked him to work for me. I let him live in my house and hang around the theatre and do things but I could never legalise him. Anything he did, he did totally under the counter, under the carpet.

**David:** Richard Demarco mentioned that he had communicated with Ellen Stewart from La MaMa at the time. For a time it didn't necessarily seem that the Traverse was going to survive and thrive in the way that it did. It was at a point where it...

**Jim:** We were more optimistic maybe.

**David:** You're very enthusiastic. He said that she was also very supportive and that she said, 'It will survive because there's love.' That's what she said.

**Jim:** [laughs]

**David:** I was just curious if you had communicated with Ellen Stewart or...

**Jim:** I like Ellen. As I'm sitting in a café on St. Marks between First and Second, I believe...the café, I can never remember the name of it and I'm sitting there...no, no, no I'm walking along there...my son lived on St. Marks for a while and I'm walking along there and I hear somebody call my name. I mean, your name called out loud and it was Ellen.

She said, 'Oh, you must come to the theatre tonight. We're opening a new play by somebody and I want you to see it. You must come.' This was many years later, maybe the '80s or '90s, but I don't remember. I said, 'Ellen, I've got a dinner party I'm invited to and I'm the guest of honour at the dinner party and I can't go to the theatre.' 'You have to come and then you can slip out the back and you have to come.' I said, 'OK. I'll come and stay twenty minutes or something like that, but I can't stay until the end or anything because I have to go. People are expecting me.'

So, I went and sat there. She went up on the stage and said, 'Tonight we have an eminent personality.' [laughs] She gave a paean of praise to me. I couldn't believe it. She said will Jim Haynes please stand up wherever you are in the audience? I stood up and everybody turned at me. [laughs]

She was wonderful. That was a good group. The funny thing about it is we were both born within, I think, two or three weeks of each other, in the same part of the world, in Louisiana. We were like fifty miles apart or something like that, in the same...

It's like some astrological phenomenon. She was great. I liked her.

**David:** I was wondering if you could reminisce or tell me about the kind of work that you saw during the summer of 1967. You had described that it inspired you to start the Arts Lab, in a way, that there was *America Hurrah* at the Royal Court, and then *Futz* and *Tom Paine*, some of them refer to it as America...

**Jim:** What inspired me to start the Arts Lab was, in a way, it was the disaster of the Cochrane Theatre adventure. I'd been bullied politely and sweetly and nicely by Jennie Lee, the minister of culture at the time, who I bonded with at some conference on the problems of the small theatre or the problems of the theatre today or something.

There was a conference, and I'd gone, and I'd been one of the speakers, and she had been one of the speakers. Afterward, there were cocktails and drinking and all that. I boldly said to her. I said, 'Jenny, how are you getting back into London, out of curiosity?'

She said 'I'm driving', and I said 'You don't have an extra place do you?' Because I didn't want to...the whole train to just...was really awkward to get there. She said, 'Sure, you could come.' Driving in just into London, I bonded with her.

We became mates, so I saw an incredible lot of her in the '60s. We became dear, dear friends, I think I could honestly say that I became very close to her. When she said to me that the Jeannette Cochrane had been a bit of a white elephant, [speaking quietly] and that nobody could make it work.

It had been lying fallow and sitting there, and everybody had put their thumbs up. She said 'You can work your magic. Come run Jeannette Cochrane.' 'Jenny, I'm involved with the Traverse. I love Edinburgh.'

She said 'You can do two cities. You can run two theatres.' So she flattered me, and I said OK. I came to London and I was running Edinburgh and the Jeannette Cochrane.

**David:** Marowitz was the vice-director or assistant director?

**Jim:** No...yeah.

**David:** Associate director?

**Jim:** Associate director. We had Marowitz, and we had a guy called Charles...we had Michael Geliot, who also later became director of the National Theatre of Wales or something like that. He's still an active director today.

We had Ralph Koltai, who was then the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre Set Designer. We four started the London Traverse. The London Traverse was an amazing...and we had Jenny put pressure on or through, Jenny was quite close to Lord Goodman, who was the...I don't know if he had been appointed Chairman of the Arts Council yet by that time, but anyway, he was quite powerful in London artistic circles.

He knew a man called Frank Coven. I think his name's Frank Coven, who was a producer, a West End producer. Goodman got Coven to give us something like £2,000, which was a lot of money at the time...he had first option on anything he wanted to move into the West End of our productions.

But the cost of production in the Jeannette Cochrane was outrageous. I'd never seen figures like...it was all practically West End figures. We had the most successful season from anybody that year. Royal Court had a bad year; the National Theatre had a bad year.

**David:** You did *Loot*, right?

**Jim:** We did *Loot*. The Traverse did *Loot*. Transferred...Marowitz also did three Saul Bellow plays which transferred as well. And we had two or three other hits that didn't transfer but got great notices and full houses and they were almost transferred. Anyway, what was I saying? I saw disaster looming. To put up a poster at the Jeannette Cochrane took a committee meeting. We were given a theatre manager which we had to take.

This guy was a real asshole, and just to get permission to put up a post there, I couldn't stand asking him for anything. So I started looking around in Covent Garden. My inspiration was to get out of expensive productions. I wanted a cheaper production so if you failed, you didn't lose everything. You still had some money, and also the production costs would be modest. We were able to say yes to anybody who had any outrageous idea at our Arts Lab because it didn't cost money. [laughs]

**David:** It seems like there was a trend that as with the Traverse, when other arts organisations receive public funding, it changes the structure. How the art is produced because they're forced to be accountable for the funds and there's a formula. Kind of higher...

**Jim:** I never got money at the Arts Lab. Tynan was on the committee or something who insisted a cheque be made out for us and Goodman refused to sign it. I had gone from being very close to Lord Goodman to being the enemy of the people. I mean I used to go and have breakfast with him in his apartment. I remember one morning giving him a copy of *International Times*, and telling him this is the tribune of our time, because he had been one of the early backers. So I was very proud, and thought he would be proud [laughs] and he was outraged by it. He thought it was a pro-junky drug newspaper. So he refused to give us any money. In a way he saved the Art Lab from the Arts Council.

**David:** The Traverse on the other hand, part of what was radical about it was the way art was produced there originally, the entire environment, that it was anti-hierarchical, but then as it started getting subsidy, it changed the whole structure.

**Jim:** Yeah, that's true. Well, that it became more and more regulated in every sense.

**David:** Yeah.

**Jim:** When I started the Traverse, I'd put out the garbage cans at night and take them in the morning. I took the tickets at the desk. I had a Dutch secretary who wrote...her English was so terrible I had to rewrite the... she was a nice woman, very passionate, very nice. She is not with us anymore, she died tragically young, but we did everything. Like three people or four people.

**David:** What you have said, it points out an important difference between yourself and Charles Marowitz. I think he's described a kind of warfare with the establishment. He describes it in terms of trench warfare.

[crosstalk]

You tended to get along with people who might be described as establishment figures in a way that he never could. Did you ever have the sense of combat with the establishment?

**Jim:** Not really. No I never did. I never got busted.

**David:** You never got busted?

**Jim:** I remember once at the Arts Lab calling up Scotland Yard asking to speak to the Inspector... Detective that was in charge of drugs and making an appointment. We were going down with a lawyer or with a friend and I got there and there were three or four policemen in the room. I said 'Look, I run the Arts Lab' and it's mainly people under thirty coming there. I would hazard a guess that probably eighty percent of them use drug...

[crosstalk]

...smoking dope of some kind. I'd just like to ask for some counselling and advice. 'What do you suggest I do about all this stuff?' [laughs] They looked at each other. They looked at me and they were thinking, 'Who is this mad man?'

But later we were raided after the founding of *Suck*. They raided us looking for *Suck* I think and also for drugs. There were two copies of *Suck* in the Arts Lab under my pillow which they never found.

**David:** They had raided the Open Space too when they were showing that Andy Warhol film. I was going to get Charles's police file under the Freedom of Information Act. Do you want me to check if there is something on you? I can do it if you want...

[crosstalk]

I know Marowitz...there is a police file because he was arrested in that cosmetic store. Then there was the incident in which the Open Space was raided. There were a number of these different scandals he was associated with. It was even debated in the House of Commons. So I think he does have a police file which I can now access through the Freedom of Information Act.

**Jim:** I was in Amsterdam already and I think we were working on the second or third edition of *Suck*. There was a knock on the door one day. I was with my Dutch colleague who opened the door and it was a Dutch plain clothes policeman and a Scotland Yard official. The Dutch guy said, 'Do you mind coming? We want to ask.. our colleague from London has come over and we want to ask you a few questions. Do you mind coming?'

He was really super polite. We were....do you mind. You are coming. Whether you want to or not. We said, 'Yes. Oh sure. We will go with you.' So we went in.

Suddenly there were two Scotland Yard and two Dutch policemen. I got one of each. My colleague and I, we were in different rooms. They asked us more or less the same questions. We said, 'Yes we publish this newspaper', 'Yes, we are proud of it', 'Yes, we're glad that we did this in Holland where we are not breaking any law' et cetera, et cetera.

At the end of it when they drove us back to our office, the Dutch policeman spoke in Dutch to my colleague and apologised. He said he only did this because Scotland Yard asked him to do it and hoped it's not an inconvenience. He was very polite. Whereas the Scotland Yard guy said, 'If you are ever in London, would you please call us'.

**David:** MI6 was monitoring Richard Demarco. They may have seen you as a subversive intellectual and so they may have kept tabs on you, I don't know.

**Jim:** I said in my autobiography at one point that when I was living in Paris I had to go to the fifth floor at police HQ which was the trouble makers' floor. Every year I had to go in to renew my papers and I'm sitting about as close as we are to the desk in the middle and this guy is smoking a pipe and dressed in a corduroy suit and a beard and looked like a real classic French intellectual. He is looking at this file.

I had at that time much better vision than I have now. I could see over and it said, 'Reporting Francoise prefecture de police' and the date. I could see that. He wasn't hiding it. The next page was a type-written page with no heading, and the next page was a type-written page

with no heading, and the next page was 'Reporting Françoise prefecture de police' and a month earlier date. So somebody was writing a report on me every month.

This guy smoking his pipe, sitting and puffing away. He was discussing literature with me and my book. It was funny. Finally he said, 'I've got good news for you today. At the end of the day you're going to have a surprise.' So I got a three-year: instead of coming back every year, I had three years. It was interesting.

**Ernie Eban:** Can I just interrupt. There weren't places like the Arts Lab in London at the time. There were places where you could go and look at art, places you could go and look at film. There were places where you could see theatre. There wasn't anywhere actually that put everything together on such a low budget.

**David:** A multimedia...

**Ernie:** No, it was not multimedia because nobody said multimedia until the 80s. That was the whole point and the other thing was that Jim was open.

**Jim:** I said yes to everything. I just never said no. [laughs] I remember once two things happened. Steven Berkoff came in there. He was your age or maybe even younger. He said he wanted to do a production.

I said, 'What do you want to do?' and he said something based on Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. I said, 'Fine, when do you want to start?' and he said 'When can I?' I said 'The theatre is free next Wednesday.'

[laughs]

It was like that. He said, 'Next Wednesday?' I said, 'Yeah! Next Wednesday.' He said, 'Well, I've got to do it now.' He had been announcing it and hadn't been able to get anyone interested. Then we did it.

**Ernie:** The way that people found out about things was through, um, the only way you could find out what was going on in London, prior to *International Times*, was either the *Evening Standard*, local newspapers, or some periodical called *What's On* which was basically aimed at getting tourists into strip clubs.

The combination of *IT* and the Arts Lab and also various other things opening up at the same time like UFO.

**David:** But also Tony Elliot from *Time Out*, he worked with you, right? *Time Out* started out of, was inspired by the *International Times*.

**Ernie:** Well, also by *New York Magazine*.

**Jim:** Tony Elliot came to me when he was still a student and he interviewed me for his university magazine. I was profiled. Then like passing time he came in and he brought me the copies of the magazine and he said, 'I want to start a literary magazine now, will you help me?'

I said, 'Tony, a literary magazine you'll have three issues, four issues, if you're lucky five. Nobody's going to buy you. Start on what's happening, what's on, what's happening with a

hip one. I'll even help you with the first six issues.' I worked on the first six issues of *Time Out*.

**David:** That was where the category 'Fringe' in London came from, right? It was *Time Out*; it was the first place that there was actually a Fringe category.

**Ernie:** There was never a fringe in London, there was an 'Underground'.

**David:** I thought in 1968 in *Time Out*, that was where they started listing Fringe productions?

**Ernie:** They may have listed but there wasn't. Fringe is something that was peculiar to Edinburgh.

**David:** But there was a proliferation...

**Ernie:** The term Fringe may have been used as a category by *Time Out*. It was very clever to do so, but basically it was 'Underground'. Nobody used that word though.

**David:** There are these different terms, Underground, Alternative, Fringe that get bantered...

[crosstalk]

**Ernie:** Have you read Miles's book?

**David:** *London Calling* Yes, I have read that.

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** I think in terms of London's perception of itself as a place where new stuff could be done, it goes back to the Albert Hall poetry reading.

**Jim:** Everybody was surprised that the poetry reading happened so kind of grassroots, word of mouth, it was this incredible hall full of people. It was like, 'Who are these people', 'Where are they coming from?', kind of thing.

**David:** In terms of theatre, the Arts Lab had this dramatic effect where within ten years. You started The Arts Lab in '68.

**Jim:** Oh no, earlier. '67.

**David:** OK, by 1967, in less than ten years, there were over 140 similar community based Arts Labs throughout Great Britain. So from 0 to over 140 in ten years, it's pretty extraordinary.

**Ernie:** But not taking into consideration there were theatre clubs in London after the war and there were in other provinces. There was repertory. There was variety, and all those things in the post-war era similarly got closed down.

**Jim:** Generally speaking pretty boring and pretty bourgeois, there was nobody under twenty or under thirty even. The interesting thing also about the explosion was a guy called Nicolas Albery. He started something which he called... he started something he called the *Arts Lab News* which he made himself.

He went to all of these places that were calling themselves Birmingham Arts Lab, Cambridge Arts Lab, Oxford Arts Lab. All of these places were calling themselves Arts Lab. He'd get information about what they were doing and he'd put it out for years. It was incredible; it was like a movement almost.

**David:** A lot of commentators describe a kind of spectrum between groups that were interested in aesthetic experimentation and those that were more politically oriented, I was wondering if you believe in that kind of spectrum or if that's rubbish...

**Jim:** There was this dichotomy. I had a lot of friends, particularly somebody like a mutual friend of ours called David Robbins, we argued for years and years and years. But I was never a Communist; I was never a Marxist; although I was a kind of...

**David:** You're an Internationalist.

**Jim:** Yeah, totally. I was never into ideology, whether it be about the Chinese Communist Party which ran intellectual life in Paris for a while. The theories... I just wanted to make things happen, let's have fun. Fun was a big factor in my life. It still is.

[pause]

**David:** You started this production with a lawyer in the United States, and I was curious about what happened with that?

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** He had a theatre and he came to me at some point in Edinburgh. He had an Off Broadway theatre in New York and he wanted to get stuck into Europe; he wanted to import what we were doing. He was a little bit like what later Frank Coven did. He really kind of wanted an option to take stuff. He said that he would like to back my season at the Arts Theatre. I said fine. But it was a total disaster. He was all talk. But we had a great season at the Arts Theatre. I don't know if you've heard about that season.

**David:** Which year was this?

**Jim:** This was 1966.

**David:** Yeah. I'm sure I've read about it.

**Jim:** Yeah. Charles did two productions, I think. He did a C P Taylor play called, *I'm the Father*. I think there was a Michael Geliot production. It was a three Traverse play season.

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** We got great reviews but the trouble with the...Arts Theatre, I don't know what the situation is today; you had to be a member of the Arts...

**David:** When it was a club.

**Jim:** ...when it was a club. You get people to buy tickets. They didn't want to be a member of the Arts Theatre.

**David:** There seemed to be a cross-fertilisation of groups that would work in the Arts Lab and also at the Open Space like Pip Simmon's Group and Nancy Meckler and that sort of...

**Ernie:** Charles...

[crosstalk]

**David:** Excuse me. These different groups worked at both of your theatres. I was wondering if that was intentional or if there was just a kind of similar sensibility?

**Jim:** Similar sensibilities and the fact that the only attempt...I tried to move one production that was a hit at the Arts Lab, so I then tried to move it to the Open Space. The people who did the production were against it. As a result, it ended up dying so...

...It was this musical called...the Feminist musical. *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven*

The next progression would have been moving into Charles's Theatre. Charles had a hole and he wanted something to move in there and in collaboration with the people who wrote the piece...well, anyway. They wanted a bigger theatre. They wanted a West End theatre. They never got the West End theatre so it died.

It would have been a hit it would have been full and packed. It would have been a hit at Charles's place. It would have been a help to him as well, it would have. Also, Victor and Sheila were ready to go on, but when you stop a production and then start getting offers of radio, television, other things, movies. They're gone, you know?

**David:** I tried to get a copy of the play, but apparently it was published by John Calder. The way he would do things is, he would publish a massive amount and then over the years it gets disbursed, people would buy it. Then once it runs out, it's gone. Apparently, it's very hard to get copies of it.

**Jim:** He lives in Paris. He's got everything. His brother's in Paris, and I can make a photocopy to bring one back.

**David:** I was going to contact him. If you can get a copy, it would be... The poster was very striking also.

**Jim:** The poster's a beautiful story. What was his name? What's his name? I can't remember his name.

**David:** The graphic designer?

**Jim:** Yeah.

**David:** I can't remember it off-hand.

**Jim:** I asked him to do the poster. People paid a lot of money for his work. He said, OK, he would do it for me as a present. He did it for me, and then the designer won a prize! He got a prize! He got money, and then later the Beatles used it in a book! He got paid two times for that poster he did for me for free. I was very pleased.

**Ernie:** Was it Alan Aldridge?

**Jim:** Alan Aldridge? What's his first name? Alan Aldridge, I think, was who did the books.

**David:** It's kind of a broader question, maybe we'll wrap things up with this, but there's currently a reassessment of the prewar generation of playwrights that's going on with Noel



Coward and the centenary of Terence Rattigan and so on. There's a book called, *1956 and All That* by Dan Rebellato. He argues that the so-called angry young man generation of postwar playwrights gained traction and momentum for their own movement through an antithesis to the prewar playwrights, that there's currently a re-evaluation of the substance of that work.

I was just curious if you had a point of view or perspective on the generation of prewar playwrights or on this kind of reassessment and so on.

**Jim:** In a way, I was always in the alternative theatre world, and the real theatre world, with the proscenium arch which had 350 or more seats, was not my world. Even though I enjoyed going to the theatre and still do, my tastes are totally catholic. I like everything. That wasn't my world. I didn't see the relevance of it. I think the guy who said I'd rather have ten theatres seating 100 rather than one theatre seating 1000. That's my point of view.

**David:** Is it an anti-show business kind of theatre?

**Jim:** Yeah, maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe. The big, expensive theatre productions, it was in the realm of money. You had to have a lot of money to put on the show. You had to have a lot of money to maintain it. The backer wanted money out of it, whereas in what we were doing was not geared towards money at all. It cost nothing to produce it. Nobody made any money. Nobody working on it made any money. It was just love.

**David:** But it's been so significant and resonant and had an impact on so many other things, so many other developments.

**Jim:** The Fringe in Edinburgh is a beautiful example of people getting together. It's almost like that old Hollywood thing. Let's make a show. [laughs] It's you find a hall, you've got to have some ideas. That's what happened.

**David:** But it seems that through your Drama Conference in 1963 and through the Arts Lab and through Marowitz's theatre, it seems that this kind of ethos, this kind of theatre practice proliferated throughout Britain and over the..

**Jim:** Well in Paris. It was a kind of catholic theatre tradition, but it's...I remember a theatre in Paris that, young Mitra Frederick, when I first went to Paris, he said, 'I want to show you this place'. It was a shallow building, and I said, 'It's just like the early Arts Lab'. It was like, 'Wow. Wow. On this side, you could have a book company here. You could have a restaurant here. You could have a gallery. You could have the theatre here and a cinema there.' I said, 'That's a great idea.'

**David:** It seems that over the course of time that this alternative theatre has had a dialectical relationship with the commercial establishment, that they've traded back and forth. You could go to the most establishment West End Theatre, commercial theatre here in London and you could see trends that you could trace back through the underground and through the alternative theatre movement. Like, for example, Nancy Meckler introduced physical theatre to the British theatrical landscape. Now, you could go to the most commercial West End Theatre, you could see things the theatre has become more physical.

[crosstalk]

You could trace it back. I was curious if you agree with that or if you've seen that, as well?

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** Yeah, I saw that, and particularly playwrights who jumped from the alternative theatre to mainstream. We discovered C.P. Taylor. He's at the National Theatre now.

[crosstalk]

**David:** ...David Hare and all the people right at the heart of the establishment.

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** I saw him recently in Paris when he was there to give a talk. I'm sitting in the audience.

[crosstalk]

He was on the platform, and he said, 'I think I see Jim Haynes'. [laughs] [indecipherable] embraced me. I was like, 'Sure. Thank God.' [laughs] He was very sweet though.

**David:** At the Drama Conference in 1963, Marowitz and Allan Kaprow, they did the Happening. There was a controversy because there was a naked lady and so on. They thought that a lot of people were really preening, and there was a lot of egoism going on at the conference. Did you have a sense of that, or were you enjoying socialising?

**Jim:** I was socialising; it was so much fun. I was having so much fun, and it was like, you know, I love Tynan. Tynan and that Happening, the whole future of experimental theatre. It was a...

[crosstalk]

**David:** I guess when the cameras...Because it was filmed, for a BBC programme. Once there were television cameras around, that people started to behave differently, and...

**Jim:** In that Happening, we had also, what's her name, Baby Doll? Carroll...

**David:** Carroll Baker?

**Jim:** Baker. She was in the back of the hall. We could all, you know, see a mink coat. Walking towards the front, an incredible figure, because she was not walking on the floor, she was walking on the backs of the chairs. And then this nude goes across the Organ Gallery. We were like, 'What did I just see? Did I just see...?' [laughs] It was so quick, and if you weren't looking you'd missed it. Then on the roof, they had a glass roof, and they had strange, like, Batmen or something, creatures up there crawling on the roof. Then Marowitz was on the stage giving a talk which was total gibberish, you know? Everyone kept saying, 'What is he talking about?' It sounded like something real, but it was unreal. That was baffling.

**Ernie:** I think it was cultural at the time. It was very different, right? The attack on Rattigan, the Tynan review, where this is the space, where everybody, everything takes place in the drawing room. Who the hell cares about this? Reflected his anger, the anger of his generation, which was directed at the previous generation, at the way the asystolic succession was working. It was becoming dysfunctional. In certain areas like painting, music, you had that. You had to learn from a known teacher, if you could. But what Jim created, I don't say created, that's bollocks, but what I think what Jim did, and what the publishers of IT and various other magazines did. 'We don't give a, anything you want to do, fine by us.'

**David:** It was a very restricted circle, with censorship and with theatre taxation.

**Ernie:** It was a little tight.

**David:** Hugh Binkie Beaumont and the whole system?

**Ernie:** Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, there was not... [laughs] They have to fill the theatres, so they have to fill the theatres with something attractive.

**Jim:** We were having a conversation late at night at Waverley station, with Oscar Lowenstein and we were talking about theatre and he said, 'You've got to have a hook. By hook I mean a star actor, a star director, a star...'

**David:** This is for commercial theatre.

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** The story was there was no cheap real estate. I bought my property all in... It's not leasehold, a freehold. 300 pounds for a bookshop. The first Traverse Theatre, I paid the rent at one shilling a year. One shilling a year!

[crosstalk]

I can't remember what was going on at the time. That was two warehouses in Covent Garden.

**Ernie:** Contemporisation is destroying the small warehouse system all over the world. So you had all this warehouse space at the time. But it is up...

**Jim:** The warehouse space becomes the living space, with completely made lofts and things like that.

**David:** It's interesting because in the beginnings of Off Off Broadway in the East Village there were a lot of groups like the Living Theatre, moving into lofts, restaurants and coffee shops. Was there any kind of a sense of, were you aware of the work they were doing or?

**Jim:** Not really, no La MaMa came over, the Open came. The Open came over later. But that was '67.

**David:** I think the Living Theatre came over in '64.

[crosstalk]

And there was the *Paradise Now* production, and the Living Theatre did *America Hurrah* at the Royal Court in 1967.

**Jim:** That's the Open Theatre, not the Living Theatre.

**David:** Joseph Chaikin.

**Jim:** Chaikin did it here, yeah.

**David:** The Open Theatre. Excuse me. I am getting confused. So Chaikin and the Open Theatre did Jean-Claude van Itallie's *America Hurrah* in the summer of '67.

**Jim:** That's right I saw it.

**David:** But the Living Theatre toured Europe in '64 and then again in '69.

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** I remember Grove Press published *The Connection*. Jack Gelbert, Barney Ross.

**David:** That was about heroin addicts, right?

**Jim:** Exactly. Yeah and Jazz.

**David:** Jazz, it was not that it was about life, but that it was life. It was actually taking place in the space with the people.

**Jim:** I saw the production in New York. They made a movie of it as well.

**David:** OK. Great, Jim. That has been terrific. I really appreciate your help and thank you for speaking with me.

**Jim:** You can come over to Paris anytime you want.

**David:** Cool, I would love to. I'll be working on this for another two years.

**Jim:** If there is anything you want just email or phone or visit, if you want.

**David:** That would be great. I will communicate with you and let you know what's happening. I can find out through the Freedom of Information Act if there's some kind of file on you.

**Jim:** I always said that I saw the reading with the guys and I saw somebody in France was writing a three page report on me. One is in New York, one is in London, one is in Amsterdam, oh God?

**David:** Yeah I know they would..

[crosstalk]

**Ernie:** ...get those files. On Sunday I downloaded the full Pentagon Papers 1.2 gigabytes. All this stuff and the reason why they weigh so much is they scanned everything in as images. [background noise] gosh. It was a magical moment and we knew it. It has been heavily truncated. The sound of [indecipherable] which is also truncated. The whole thing sets the love [indecipherable]

**David:** There is an interesting point that Peter Ansorge in his book, *Disrupting the Spectacle* and others people have mentioned. In the beginning of the underground or alternative fringe theatre the War in Vietnam figured very prominently on stages here in London to the exclusion of the situation in Northern Ireland or what ethnic minorities were facing here in Britain. That there was more of a concern with American themes.

**Jim:** Following the media. American media, part of it. Pushing it on us.

**David:** Is there a kind of cultural domination?

**Ernie:** There was, I think it had something to do with the nuclear deterrent.

**David:** Well Britain is occupied in a sense by the United States.

**Jim:** Somebody once said that Britain was an aircraft carrier.

**Ernie:** There were two Prime Ministers who actually turned down Dwight Eisenhower and L.B.J. on sending troops.

**David:** But there have been US military bases, one which you were stationed at, scattered throughout Britain since World War II.

**Ernie:** Well what do you expect?

**David:** Well, it's a kind of occupation.

**Ernie:** Well, you know there was a Cold War back then; you could get wiped out at any moment.

**David:** Immediately before the D-Day invasion six percent of the resident population of Britain were Americans.

**Jim:** Really?

**David:** Yeah.

**Ernie:** I think also there were the writers. There were American playwrights for sure.

**David:** Yes, Sam Shepard, there was the *US* production, the Peter Brook production and...

**Ernie:** Yeah, well that was... as I mentioned [indecipherable off mic comment]

**David:** Do you think that the National Theatre responded to, I mean...

**Jim:** That was Kenneth Tynan, In a way, *Oh Calcutta*.

**Ernie:** *Oh Calcutta* certainly.

**David:** Kenneth Tynan. I'm curious about your relationship with Kenneth Tynan. You got along with him.

**Jim:** I did, I did. I would spend a lot of time with him.

**David:** Yeah, that's good.

[crosstalk]

**Jim:** Especially at the 1963 Drama Conference we bonded. Because we both had an interest in sexuality. There was a German girl who later married an Austrian prince. In Edinburgh, who Ken had an eye on and she had an eye on him and I had an eye on them. Them and her, it was like a little triangle. I remember Ken going to the theatre one night in Edinburgh on his own and he said, 'Can you give this ticket to somebody who would also like to go'. So I said, 'Aha. I will play Cupid' and I gave it to her and I set them up.

**David:** He worked himself to death. He was so stressed with everything and...

**Jim:** The cigarettes.

**David:** At the National...

**Ernie:** Cigarettes.

**Jim:** So that's what did it.

[crosstalk]

**Ernie:** He had bad lungs as a kid. He got pneumonia in 1947 and he also took a lot of speed.

**Jim:** Ernie's done a lot of biographical research on Tynan for the Tynan Estate for Kathleen, his second wife.

**David:** She published correspondence. Kenneth Tynan's letters.

**Ernie:** Yeah.

**David:** Oh that was...

**Ernie:** I organised that.

**David:** If you don't mind, what is your background?

**Jim:** Oxford lawyer.

[crosstalk]

**David:** I was a St. Anne's myself.

**Ernie:** St. Anne's that's a very nice college.

[laughter]

**Ernie:** Very nice, they have a modern block which is rather unfortunate. I am not sure how well it has aged.

**David:** I was there in '96 and, yeah, it was good. Usually it ranks pretty high in the league tables for small college. It was originally a women's college.

[crosstalk]

**David:** I guess it had the best rugby team of any college when I was there.

[cuts off]

Transcription by CastingWords

**Appendix Six**  
**Nancy Meckler Interview**  
**14 January 2012**  
**London**

**David Weinberg:** Thank you very much, Nancy, for agreeing to spend time with me. I guess we'll just dive in. I wanted to ask you, regarding your experimentation, whether you had a deliberate intention to create a new kind of dramaturgy based on the physicalisation of language?

**Nancy Meckler:** Well, I had quite a, sort of, conventional theatre background, because I was at Antioch College, and then I went to the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art for a year-long, it was an acting course in the Classics and Shakespeare. So I had a very conventional background. But when I came back to the States after that, a friend of mine from LAMDA was in a small group started by this chap Stanley Rosenberg, who had been with Eugenio Barba in Denmark. And he was starting this company and so there were probably about seven of us in the company, and he was introducing all of these Grotowski exercises, like the Cat and lots of physical exercises. There was no explanation or theory behind any of it, it was just you come and you do the exercises together. Most of us were actually working or going to school during the day, so we used to come in at 3.30 and stay until 7. Some of them were teachers, some were actors, and I was doing an MA at NYU. There was a new MA with Richard Schechner... Robert Brustein was part of it, I think, although he didn't teach me. It was called something like Dramatic Theory and Criticism, something like that. And it really was a very loose course, and you know, Schechner always set you very strange and anarchic assignments. He was starting the Performing Garage that year, so he created *Dionysus in 69* in that year. So I saw a lot of... I was exposed to this idea of physical theatre and Grotowski, and of course I had seen the Living Theatre as well, and so ...when I was doing these physical exercises I found them so interesting because I felt much more released as an actor than I ever had when I had studied in a conventional way, and I was very self-conscious of that as an actor. So I was really interested in using those techniques, and then I came here... I'm just [unclear] because *Dionysus in 69*, that doesn't kind of make sense, because I came here in '68. Maybe I came here at the end of '69, I can't remember now. But, I came here...

**David:** The Arts Lab started in August of 67, I believe.

**Nancy:** Okay. Well I thought I came here in August '68, but then I'm thinking how did I see *Dionysus in 69*, maybe it wasn't created in 1969. Because I remember seeing it as a student. Anyway, I came here and I couldn't, I didn't have a work permit, but I wanted to stay here for a few months with friends.

**David:** What was it that attracted you to Britain?

**Nancy:** What attracted me, let's see. When I was at College, at Antioch College, we spent a year abroad and a lot of us went to France for a year, to university. And it was a very very dull university, in Besançon, it wasn't Paris, it was so dreary. And I just spent all my time there trying to think of how to get out. So I wrote to lots of drama colleges asking if they would take me for a term. And amazingly the Guildhall said I could come and audition. And I came and auditioned, I think the Guildhall was in a sort of odd state at the time, and they said,

oh you know we don't think we could take you as a full-time student but you could be a part-time student. So I lived in England for three months and was a part-time student at the Guildhall. I did like three classes. So I adored England at that time, and then, so that was when I was still at university, so that was about 1960. But then later, I think what happened was I applied to LAMDA, it must have been when I was two years out of university.

**David:** Marowitz also went to LAMDA. Was there some particular...?

**Nancy:** Did he? Well they had an American course, they had a course for overseas students. It was a one-year, it's the 1) course, there were only ten of us. My course had actually we had Stacy Keach, he's still now fairly well known.

**David:** I think John Lithgow did the same course.

**Nancy:** Yes, after me I think. I think he's younger than me. But what happened was, I was in New York, I wanted to be an actress and I was ... I was also, yes that was '63? '64, '65? Yes, that's right, '65, because it was the year after Kennedy died. Somebody said to me, oh you have to audition for everything because it's very good for you to audition. Any time you hear about an audition, you just go and do it. So, I went and did this audition for LAMDA. I had no intention of coming to England. And then I got in. And then I thought, oh wait a minute, I've already been to England, I've already done drama college there, and I ummed and ahed and then I thought, what the hell, and I came. So I came for, like, nine months. I actually stayed on, because I started therapy at the time, which probably wasn't very smart to start therapy in a foreign country, because I couldn't really leave after nine months, so I stayed another year in England. So I had a very close connection with England. Went back, and I got a job amazingly on a Broadway musical with Jules Dassin, it was a musical of his film *Never on Sunday* that he was making with his wife, Melina Mercouri. And I got this job as the production secretary because I could speak French, which was even more bizarre as I couldn't take short-hand. But I got the job because I could speak French. And I did that for a year. And then I did that course, the Masters course, and then I really was just in England visiting all my friends from here, and I met my husband, who you just met, and I thought, oh maybe I'll stay a few weeks, rather than a week. So I said I was going to stay for a month, because we had started going out because he was a good friend of a friend of mine. And then I thought, maybe I'll stay for maybe two or three months, because I don't have any work in New York, and so I stayed on and I never left. And because he was a lawyer at the time, he was busy all day long and I couldn't work here without a permit, so I tried to find out if there was any theatre I could get involved with. There was a La MaMa Company here, run by Beth Porter, who had been in *Futz* and *Hair*. She was still here and she was starting a company, so I went along with my friend and my friend didn't join in but I did, and I would just go and work with them every day. And I kept saying, oh I don't think I'm an actor any more, and I don't know what I want to do, maybe I want to direct, I'm not sure. I had done a bit of directing in America, and I was just kind of hanging out with them. And they were also doing all these physical exercises, because Tom O'Horgan had directed them and they did things like the Cat, and they did all the Grotowski exercises and it was a very physical way of working. So, I was then thinking, oh well all these things I just learnt you know in this other company I was in in New York, maybe I'll try some of these things out.

**David:** You were involved with La MaMa and Tom O'Horgan in New York?



**Nancy:** No, I wasn't, that's what's even more confusing. Let's see. When I was in New York doing the Masters programme, that was 1967 and '68. At the same time as doing the Masters programme, in the afternoons I was in this company, and it was called La MaMa Plexus. And it was run by the chap Stanley Rosenberg. And Ellen Stewart was very supportive. I don't think she gave us rehearsal space, we found rehearsal space. But she was very supportive and she let us perform at La MaMa. And we were doing all these exercises with him. So that's when I got interested in all of that.

**David:** I am very curious about Ellen Stewart. She was communicating with Richard Demarco when the Traverse was first founded. They weren't certain that it was going to survive and it was, they emulated La MaMa in a lot of ways, and Richard Demarco was telling me about this conversation he had with Ellen Stewart and she said it will survive because there's love. That's what she said.

**Nancy:** Ah, that's sweet. Well, that's what she was like. It was very instinctive with her. If she liked the sound of you or the look of you, she'd let you use her space. There was this rumour that she used to just sit and hold a script and go like this, and decide whether or not to do it. But I think it was more the person, you know. She just either felt that she kind of felt something with the person, and said come and do your play here, or come and rehearse here.

**David:** It seems with her and Jim Haynes, they were facilitators of theatre and brought people and ideas together.

**Nancy:** Oh yeah, they didn't really get involved that much. Cause Jim Haynes also supported me because when I came here, when he really gave support, when I came here and I was working with this group, we had nowhere to rehearse. And so we went to Jim Haynes and he said we could rehearse in the Arts Lab and at that time it was very busy and he would only let us work... I remember in the mornings we used to warm up in the foyer, and David Hare and Howard Brenton who were in the Portable Theatre used to walk through, and Beth Porter used to shout at them and say that yours is theatre of the larynx. We're not interested in theatre of the larynx. You know, we used to tease them as they went through the foyer. And then later in the day, we had a room that we could rehearse in. And Jim Haynes, same thing. He just liked the look of us. And he... Beth left it. There was a kind of falling out. Beth went to America to film *Futz* I think.

**David:** There was some dispute, I think, about using the name of the company.

**Nancy:** Yes, it was called Warehouse La MaMa. And, have you spoken to her?

**David:** No.

**Nancy:** Okay, she is a very strong character and I was just, I was there I think I said I was a sort of like an assistant director, because I didn't want to act but I wanted to have something to do during the day. And Beth went to New York to film *Futz* and while she was there we wanted to work on a project. So the company was saying to me, come on, you know you've directed in the past, why can't you do a project with us? So, I started doing this little project with them, which was called *Alternatives*. And Beth came back from New York and suddenly announced we weren't going to have any directors in the company, so I of course got very upset and at a certain point she said, and in fact she said, I'm disbanding this company as of today. It no longer exists. This company doesn't exist. She was very pissed off about

something, I'm not sure what, I never found out what it was all about. But anyway, maybe she felt that I was taking over, because she left and I directed something, you know. I never found out. But she, when she said I disband this company, we had just got this booking at the Mercury Theatre to do...

**David:** Which is where *Futz* took place.

**Nancy:** Did it?

**David:** Yes, the Mercury *Futz* and *Tom Paine* was the same summer as *America Hurrah* was at the Royal Court.

**Nancy:** Well, this was later.

**David:** I believe it was *Futz* that went to the Traverse, and then it transferred to the Mercury Theatre.

**Nancy:** Really. Well, I didn't see it, because that was before I came. That must have been '67...

**David:** Summer of '67.

**Nancy:** Yeah, I came in '68. And the Mercury... I mean we wanted to go on performing and there were seven of us, and somebody said, well why don't we go to the Mercury and say, she's disbanded the company but we want to carry on and we'll change the name. So, that's what we did. They said fine, we could come and perform. We changed the name to Freehold.

**David:** Where did that come from?

**Nancy:** It was just one of the actors, he was really good at thinking up names. He said, I've got a name, I've got a name. We'll call ourselves Freehold. And we went in and we performed, but there was nobody there. There were like three people and I would say, because we had no money and no marketing in those days. *Time Out* magazine was only just starting anyway.

**David:** It emerged out of the *International Times*, is my understanding. Tony Elliot was working with Jim Haynes and wanted to start his own alternative to...

**Nancy:** It was like a two page, little two page you know stapled together thing. That was all it was when it started. But we did do that. We did these performances there, and then one of our members was very close, I think she was going out with Max Stafford-Clark who was running the Traverse. So they, he invited us to Edinburgh, and we went up and took these plays to Edinburgh. One was this *Alternatives* that I had created, one was this terrible play called *Mr Jello* that Ben had brought to us. And then we also did a Maria Fomes play, *Late Night*, because I love Maria Irene Fomes and we did this play called *The Life of Three*. And Stephen Rea was in the company, you know obviously it was very early days for him.

**David:** He described working with you in *Fringe First*, the Roland Rees book. He regards his work with you and Freehold as his real training, as opposed to his time at the Abbey.

**Nancy:** Yeah, well I mean it was a training. We did a lot of physical training, we did political training, you know... I think it was very formative for Stephen. I don't see him very often, but when I do it's always you know, we're the oldest friends. He always says to me that whenever he's doing a show he always goes out to warm up on stage beforehand. If anybody comes up the stairs and he looks like a freak and he says, it's all your fault. He says to me, it's all your fault that I do that.

**David:** There are certain practices that seem to be more common now, that can be traced back through the experimental theatre. I wonder if you found that also.

**Nancy:** Absolutely. Oh yeah, I think particularly in England the alternative theatre has had a huge impact on mainstream theatre, it always come from the fringe. The thing that happens in England with subsidised theatre, is it gets absorbed very quickly. As soon as they see something exciting, they get them in to do a show for them. So, Complicite very early on they were invited to make shows at the National, which didn't work out very well because, of course, it wasn't a good way for Complicite to develop a show. And in fact I think they only did one show at the National which didn't work because they really needed to be on the road, and make mistakes and change things, you know. And so it didn't really last. I think they only made initially one show there. And then after that whenever they made a show at the National they would workshop it first. But see, I think the establishment is always very quick to absorb the avant-garde, and so...

**David:** It's within the term avant-garde, advance guard, that these techniques would be incorporated later into the mainstream. I think The People Show has deliberately tried to remain aloof from that. They claim to have no influences, although probably jazz was an influence.

**Nancy:** Have you interviewed...?

**David:** I have not, no.

**Nancy:** Because, this woman in my company who was dating Max Stafford-Clark, later she was dating Mark Long from The People Show and so we got to know them. And my husband, he was a lawyer, but then he began, he started, he wanted to be a producer, and so...

**David:** He ran the Hampstead, right?

**Nancy:** At first what he did, he ran all these fringe companies. So he ran us, Freehold. I think he managed People Show. He started Joint Stock with Max Stafford-Clark and he ran Foco Novo.

**David:** Oh yeah.

**Nancy:** We ran all of those from our basement, but of course it was very easy in those days to run, four or five theatre companies for that matter, because it was so simple.

**David:** Jim Haynes has described a lot of spaces opening up, warehouses, and it was easy to find spaces in a way that is not the case nowadays.

**Nancy:** It wasn't that easy. It wasn't that easy. I don't know quite what he means by that. But he gave us a great break because after we'd done this run in the Traverse...

**David:** There was also the Oval House, places like this. Your husband ran, he was one... he was director of the board.

**Nancy:** Yes, he was on the board of the Oval House.

**David:** And a lot of the groups after the Arts Lab folded migrated to the Oval House.

**Nancy:** Yeah, I think... yeah because the People Show went down there, and maybe they'd never been in the Arts Lab. But I know when the Arts Lab shut I remember going down to the Oval House and meeting the guy who ran it, and asking if we could rehearse there. And he said yes, he would just charge us, if we each paid the equivalent of a tube fare everyday, we could rehearse there. So we rehearsed our show *Antigone* there. And the People Show where there, and I think there was another company called Inside Out... there were a couple of companies that rehearsed there. And then we all started performing there as well, because it was free. You know, it wasn't registered as a theatre in those days, you didn't have health and safety or anything.

**David:** It was a former gym, I think. Converted...

**Nancy:** It was a youth centre. During the day it was a youth centre, it was still a youth centre, but it didn't have a lot of activity going on. And Pip Simmons worked there, we all worked there, we didn't pay any rent.

**David:** Did you work at the Open Space?

**Nancy:** No, that was Marowitz's space. No, I didn't.

**David:** I'm curious about how *Antigone* came about.

**Nancy:** Well, what happened was that after we'd gone to the Traverse and done *Mr Jello* and *Alternatives*, we came back and we got this room to work in, because the Arts Lab was closing so we got this room to rehearse in at Oval House. And we started creating *Antigone*. And I think when I was doing the stuff with Stanley Rosenberg, I was fascinated by, he was always using Greek tragedy. He often used scenes from Oedipus Rex for these exercises we would do. We'd do these very very lengthy improvisations where everyone was kind of acting out their expressionistic subtext, and there was never any discussion of any of it, but people would do these amazing things, and other people would feed the words in. And I just thought it was really interesting, so I thought I'd like to have a go at it. But I used *Antigone*.

**David:** And you changed the calling upon the gods to...

**Nancy:** Well, what happened was, in those days what I think what would happen a lot was people would bring along friends who were interested in this kind of thing. And there was a young man who later ran Dartington College called Peter Hulton, and he came along and said I'd like to be involved with you. I think he hung out for a while with the Living Theatre. And he said, can I work with you on the script, like a dramaturg, you know? And he kept making suggestions, and it was a very odd informal... I mean nobody was being paid, so it was a very

informal arrangement where sometimes I agreed with him, sometimes I didn't agree with him. That he could say, I don't think you need that scene, it could be replaced with a poem and... instead of this, you could say god, you could say love, or you could say... You know, he was making all these suggestions, and some of them I was incorporating. And it was a deconstructed version of Sophocles, and then I had a version of it that I was retyping all the time, sort of, redoing the language a bit, so it was more speakable. And we did it, and then what happened was, we rehearsed it for three months and we did it at the Arts Lab. Because Jim Haynes was very keen on us and gave us space. And somebody in the group managed to get us a booking at the Edinburgh Festival, in the same tent that the People Show was going to be in. It was a circus tent by day, it was very small. And in the evenings we alternated doing the six and the nine o'clock show, the People Show did the six and the nine o'clock. We had no audience to speak of, except I think the People Show were getting their audience, because they had nudity and they had a bit of a sensation. We tended to have about six or seven people every night. And Jim Haynes was there with somebody who was supposed to be taking a Brecht over to a festival in Berlin. And he saw the Brecht, I think it was Cambridge students doing it, and he didn't like it. And Jim said to him, come and see these kids in this tent, I think you should come and see them. So, he came to see us and he said, well I want to take you to Berlin and I want to take you to open my Arts Festival. And so, suddenly, there we were on a train to Berlin, opening this arts festival in his 600-seat theatre. So that was amazing. You can imagine, from nothing to that.

**David:** What was the response like?

**Nancy:** Where, in Berlin?

**David:** In Berlin.

**Nancy:** It was fantastic, but I don't know whether they were like that. Oh no, they just loved it, you know, it was fantastic. And I guess Ricky, we must have known Ricky from when we were up rehearsing. When we were up in Edinburgh doing that other show, we must have all met him, because we were all rehearsing, we were already rehearsing the Greeks. So then he wanted us to appear in his gallery, I think we did the show for one night in the gallery. So we had no set, so you could do it anywhere. It had no lights or anything.

**David:** I'm curious about... there was an anti-Vietnam war theme....

**Nancy:** Yeah, I mean the Vietnam War was on everybody's mind, and Peter just had... I guess it was toward the end there was a chorus that we changed to this chant of, in the name of love for a country, a man has gone to war. In the name of love for a country, a brother is not buried. In the name of love for a country... you know the idea of people going to war because they do it in the name of love. So, yes, of course it had key Vietnam overtones, because it's a young man who lies unburied, and so those were the overtones. But we weren't wearing modern clothes or anything like that.

**David:** Some people have claimed that there was a dominance of American themes on the fringe in London, to the exclusion of British contemporaneous issues, like Northern Ireland or West Indians here in Britain, and that there was a real...

**Nancy:** Well, there probably was an American movement, because there was Beth Porter and me, that was from La MaMa. And then people like Pip Simmons... no but Pip Simmons was imitating, I mean he did...

**David:** Americana. But he didn't go to the United States until 1973 himself, but his shows were dealing with the kind of Americana, *Superman* and these kinds of shows.

**Nancy:** He did the one about the trial, didn't he? About... was it called *Do it?*

**David:** *Do it*. There was also the one about the Democratic convention, 1968 convention. And then there was *The Minstrel Show*, where they incorporated the audience. And I'm curious about this because it seems that there was a kind of breaking down of traditional hierarchies, in terms of director, actor, playwright, audience, in a kind of passive...

**Nancy:** The Living Theatre was a big influence. I think we all saw the Living Theatre when they came here at that time. I think a lot of us were imitating that. And the Open Theatre, I had always adored the Open Theatre, and although one didn't know how they did what they did, on some level we were imitating it and trying to understand it. Because the Living Theatre shows were really wild. I mean, they did shows at the Roundhouse, they did *Frankenstein*... It was just huge. People were pouring out onto the streets and by the end of the show people were jumping naked into the arms of other spectators and everybody was as high as a kite on every drug known to man. And they were saying things like theatre belongs to the people, come out and onto the streets. And everybody was going out into the streets and... And after you've been to a performance like that, conventional theatre seemed very tame. And you think, oh that's what we want to do, you know, we want to break down barriers and we don't want to have sets and costumes and we don't want to have stars and we don't want to have... it was all very anti-establishment basically, because the establishment in England was very very very straight-laced.

**David:** You had censorship until 1968, and you also had theatre taxation, but no public subsidy of theatre.

**Nancy:** Yes, that's right. So it was really anti-establishment and it moved into the whole hippie thing, which was also anti-consumerism and anti-establishment, anti-straight-laced parents. You know, *Hair* opened that summer when I arrived. You know, everybody was growing their hair and singing Beatles songs and Simon and Garfunkel. And so, if you were a theatre company, and you weren't being paid, it was because you were really making an anti-establishment gesture. I don't want to be in restrained theatre. I mean Stephen Rea was making a living because he was Irish and he would get a lot of acting jobs as an Irish actor, and he came to us and he said, I don't want to be an Irishman, that's not what I want to do. He worked, we all worked for nothing. I don't know how we managed it, but life was much cheaper, I mean you could live on ten pounds a week, and that means rent and food.

**David:** So really what defines the alternative theatre is that it was not tied, or is not tied, to the profit principle, what's alternative or alternative to what, is the commercial West End establishment perhaps.

**Nancy:** And we never went to see the commercial theatre either. I mean, having done that, having always gone to see, you know, Laurence Olivier, and going to Stratford upon Avon, nobody would go and see anything. It was very much to do with the... a lot of it was to do

with the hippie movement as well, you know, that anything that came from your parents' generation, anything your parents would go to, you wouldn't go to. Anything your parents would wear, you wouldn't wear. Anything they would value, like you know, success or careerism or having your name on a programme, everything was ... nothing mattered except peace and love, you know, and community. So, a lot of it was a reflection of that. That if you weren't doing that in your life, I wasn't living in a commune and I wasn't being horrible to my parents but theatrically I was doing the equivalent, you know, working with a group where the actress said, oh you know, we'll have our names on the programme but we don't want anyone to know what parts we play. We don't want to...

**David:** The Unity Theatre also, with Paul Robeson, he appeared...

**Nancy:** That was earlier. And I don't think we knew much about that. But then of course there was the Roundhouse which was a very exciting place too. So it was, it was all tied into flower power and to the music of the period, and to ... it was a generation rebelling. And there was a huge American influence, I mean people didn't wear blue jeans until they came from America, did they? In those days you didn't have McDonalds over here. The whole idea now of when you go around the world and you have the Americanisation of the whole world. I mean you could find American clothing, American shoes, American food, but you didn't have anything here. In 1968, there was Kentucky Fried Chicken, but that was the only fast food you could buy on the street really.

**David:** Why did that happen? Was it the...

**Nancy:** Because American culture was so exciting. I think American culture lived that way. It was very exciting. It was a youth culture, it was casual living, it was... Now, people feel poisoned by American culture, but in those days everything about it was exciting. Marilyn Monroe was exciting, Andy Warhol was exciting, the factory... I mean, it was like Europe and the rest of the West didn't have anything like it. When the Living Theatre came and went through Europe, nobody had anything like that. Nobody was doing that. I guess the nearest thing would have been what Grotowski was doing in Poland. And then it was the same period when Peter Brook became obsessed with Grotowski, and Theatre of Cruelty, and he did those experiments at LAMDA in the theatre. And that led to the *Marat/Sade*, and *US*. So that obsession with American culture, because American culture was different, exciting, inventive. It's a bit like the Apple Mac, you know. It's a bit like the way the world feels like...

**David:** Just kind of tapped into the Zeitgeist or...

**Nancy:** It was new, it was playful, it was exciting. And it was very anti-staid establishment, and it was about youth culture. Because up until that generation, when you grew up you wanted to look thirty-five, and when I was at university, your aim was to end up looking thirty-five. You know, you wanted to wear high heels and stockings and suits, and you wanted to grow up. But when that generation hit, every thirty-five year old wanted to look eighteen. That was the beginning of middle-aged people wearing jeans, middle-aged people growing their hair long. You know, even now people are trying to look eighteen. But there was no such thing as youth culture, there was no such thing as youth culture I would have thought before Vietnam and flower power. I think that was ... after the Second World War, the world was a quite conservative place. And everybody wanted to feel very safe and secure and for children to grow up in a very perfect world...

**David:** Eisenhower was in the White House, and all the former soldiers were now in their thirties and so on.

**Nancy:** And everybody wanted to be a grown-up. But when flower power and all that happened, it was very rebellious, very anti-establishment, and it was anti-materialism. And that was why it started in America. Because when all that style thing happened here, I think it was an excitement about the style. But when it happened in America I think it was anti-materialism. America was such a materialist culture in the late fifties, early sixties. Whereas you wouldn't say that about England. When I came to visit England, I never felt that it was a consumerist or materialist culture. People weren't used to constant shopping, and, do you know what I mean. It was very conservative, staid, and still quite dour. When I first came in 1960, I remember I was living in a flat with friends and we wanted a party, and I wanted to serve a sour cream dip. There wasn't such a thing as a sour cream... First of all nobody had ever heard of anything called sour cream, and the idea of a dip was completely unheard of, or something like...

**David:** It's still the same with salad dressings. The Brits don't seem to have a lot of salad dressings. I order a salad and they bring the salad with no dressing whatsoever.

**Nancy:** Whereas in America you have twenty or thirty choices.

**David:** There was a community of American ex-patriots, like Jim Haynes and Ed Berman and Charles Marowitz, and some of the people who were working with them. Were you aware of one another?

**Nancy:** Oh yeah, I mean, obviously, I knew Jim. And then Ed Berman was running the

**David:** Inter-Action.

**Nancy:** Inter-Action.

**David:** There was also the guy who was working with Jim Haynes, Jack Henry Moore. And then there was Walter Donohue, who was Marowitz's assistant.

**Nancy:** We all knew each other because we were all in the fringe, and when there was something like a fringe festival, like there was a fringe festival up at the Liverpool Playhouse. We all went up there and we all performed there.

**David:** Was there any sense of it reflecting the Off or Off-Off Broadway movement, that was...?

**Nancy:** Well, I think people were very aware of Sam Shepard and those plays, you know some of those playwrights.

**David:** I think Marowitz introduced him at the Open Space. He had an American season of plays in 1969. For the Open Space, it was essentially like an Off-Broadway space in London, where there was a real emphasis on American playwrights. But I...

**Nancy:** Is he American, Charles?



**David:** He is. He's from Greenwich Village.

**Nancy:** But, I see, he's probably older than me. I'm 70.

**David:** He was born in '32, so 79.

**Nancy:** So, it was a slightly different generation, do you know what I mean? And I thought Ed Berman was older than me as well, and the people you're mentioning, I think they were older... they were all a bit older, they were already here. Whereas I came in the year of the big Vietnam exodus. I didn't come because of Vietnam, but it was the year when a lot of people left America because of Vietnam and because they didn't want to fight in the war. So, yes, there was a huge influence of American culture in every way. And, all things American were seen to be incredibly exciting and fun and ... Marilyn Monroe was a fantastic figure. As I say, Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Can*. You know all of that, and all those artists like Rauschenberg and everybody, Jim Dine. It was all very exciting. Nobody was doing that kind of thing, or if they were I wasn't very aware of it. If they were, I don't know.

**David:** I think Rauschenberg, was the first to actually project a photographic image onto a canvas and Andy Warhol kind of pilfered that from him. Peter Brook said something about, you know he moved to Paris, and he said something about the ground for experimentation here in Britain is... I have it somewhere... it's that the ground is not fertile here in Britain. That there is an ambivalence towards experimentation and that, he left and he was seriously considering at one point having the RSC experimental group take place in Paris. Marowitz also had these kinds of sentiments about the British theatrical landscape, at least when he originally arrived, and I was wondering if you sensed that, a kind of... a very...

**Nancy:** Well, I think in terms of getting subsidy for doing that sort of work, after all Peter Brook wanted to be subsidised. And I don't think there was such an appetite for it within the system, so he wouldn't have been subsidised if he stayed here to do that kind of work. To say, I want to rehearse for three months, and I want to take my company to Africa. I mean, nobody is going to fund you to do that. I think the culture is very much... well, art should be a bit elitist or can you really prove you're worth that. Art for art's sake is a bit of a problem in England. I think it is a very puritanical country from that point of view. And so they're not going to fund it easily. So, I would have thought Peter Brook left because he couldn't have done that level of experimentation. I don't think he would ever have got the funding, people would have thought it was terrible indulgent to get that level of funding to experiment. And so the new experimental companies always start with no money and they're just scrabbling until the Arts Council gives them something. It's still stark like that.

**David:** Many people describe this kind of axis of avant-garde versus agit-prop kind of alternative theatre. Theatre like the Cartoon Archetypal, the CAST group or Red Ladder, that's explicitly political. And there are also groups that are more interested in aesthetic innovation and this sort of thing. Do you think that's accurate? Is there this kind of...?

**Nancy:** Well, there certainly are both strands, aren't there. And I think the 60s, the late 60s stuff was more about performance. I mean there were political groups, there always have been, but, I don't think they proliferated the way the artistically experimental have proliferated.

**David:** You've been very interested in the status of women in the theatre. How have you seen things change?

**Nancy:** Well, when I started there were very few women directors. Joan Littlewood was very famous, and I think there was a woman who worked in commercial theatre called Wendy Toye, who did musicals. So, it was very unusual for a woman to be a director, which is probably why I didn't pursue it. Because I wasn't really sure anyone would take me seriously even if I wanted to do it. But then I fell into it, because people knew I had directed and so they would say, oh, come and direct this, or, oh come and direct that. And then one day, oh gosh, look at this, I'm really a director. I hadn't realised that was what I was becoming. But there were no role models for me. There was a woman named Jane Howell at the Royal Court. But often they were very tough, very masculine women, not that they, they weren't gay, but they were very butch in behaviour. And I didn't fit into that either, so I just couldn't imagine that anybody would take me seriously if I said I wanted to direct. And for some reason, I didn't realise that I was becoming a director. I'm still not sure why that was. It was very odd.

**David:** That's very interesting. That's really terrific. I think I've covered my questions.

**Nancy:** Okay, I was just wondering if there was any... are you looking for any visual material? Because I was trying to put stuff together to give to the Theatre Museum, and I'm now wondering... Usually I wouldn't have it but only because everything, we've decorated recently so actually everything has got sort of pulled out, put into envelopes and...

**David:** A good friend of mine did the same course at L.A.M.D.A. and he just went to this 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary reception for L.A.M.D.A. It's the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday, I don't know if you went.

**Nancy:** Did they do a musical performance as well, something like that?

**David:** I didn't go myself...

**Nancy:** I don't tend to go to any of those things, even though... sometimes just because I'm too busy. I'm on the mailing list and I get the stuff.

**David:** Any kind of archival material you have would be very interesting.

**Nancy:** This is really funny. This must have been me applying for money, I think. Actually this was... I must have been writing to the Arts Council. It is an estimate... No, this is much later. This is when I was trying to start up again. I tried to start the Freehold up again, and I think I applied to the Arts Council. This is wonderful, listen, fourteen actresses at sixty pounds a week. But, it's just curious to see what I did I say at that time about... from September 16<sup>th</sup> to April '73.

**David:** Would there be a time that would be convenient for you, when I could spend a few hours just going through documents.

**Nancy:** Yes, you could. This is all the stuff from the Freehold. Like, this was our notepaper. You can see it's all handmade notepaper. And here's Jim Haynes, here's a letter from Jim Haynes. He says Nancy, Tony, Diana, Laurence, Stephen, Neal, Hugh and Pauline. I thought that *Mr Jello / Alternatives* excellent. I would quibble over very little in both. Hope all goes

well. I have already told a dozen people to go. If you would like to transfer this, or anything else, then please let me know. I am in the process of making new plans now. *Vagina Rex* ends here 16<sup>th</sup> of March, Blessings. So, you know...

**David:** Like *Vagina Rex* and *The Gas Oven*. I tried to get a copy of that, but apparently it's Calder who published it, but what they would do is publish a massive number of them, and not reprint them and then once they've run out then they're just gone. I've gone to a lot of trouble trying to find a copy.

**Nancy:** This was the scripts. This is actually the legal papers, because my husband did run it as a proper company. But I, where did I have...

**David:** It's interesting to see the Arts Lab letterhead here.

**Nancy:** Yeah, look at that. Isn't that amazing. I can't think what I've done with the rest of it all.

**David:** I met with Jim Haynes here in London, it was in August, I met with him in August. And I may go visit him in Paris at some point.

**Nancy:** Well, I've got one thing that is just lots of photographs, a few photographs we had of Freehold. And pictures of us working in Demarco's, I think. I'm not sure where it is. I think it's at the back there. So, you could. Do you want to look at stuff today?

**David:** Not necessarily. Well, I don't mind, but if you want to establish a time that's convenient for you. I know it's kind of very variable. I'm working on this project and I've met with this publisher, Matthew Frost, and your theatre practices are a substantial part of what I'm writing about. And he was very enthusiastic about the potential for a book to come out of this, so these kind of photos you have of Freehold could potentially, with your permission, could potentially be something really great.

**Nancy:** Yeah, the thing is because I'm working at Stratford during the week, and then I'm going straight up to Glasgow to do a project, I'm just not around for, you know...

**David:** I'm not in a big rush. It's whatever...

**Nancy:** Well, as you're here, you're welcome to look at some of the stuff today, and then you could just decide if you want to come back or not.

**David:** Great, I'd really appreciate that.

**Nancy:** I'll just quickly look and see if I have got it, I'm pretty sure I've got it here. I'm just going to get a stepladder.

**David:** Great, thank you.

**Nancy:** And Max used to come and standing in the corner, and take notes the whole time. Day after day after day, he'd take notes on what we were doing. And then when I came back to England, I said to him, can I come and watch what you're doing and take notes, and he wouldn't let me.

**David:** Wow, that's very odd.

**Nancy:** Well, he's a bit like that, I'm afraid. I'm pretty sure...just let me have a look at this and see. Yeah, he used to come and watch us and take notes all the time, he's always taking notes on our exercises. So I think he used a lot of our exercises. Here it is.

**David:** And he played rugby, right, for the Edinburgh Dragons?

**Nancy:** Did he?

**David:** Originally he was at Trinity College, Dublin and he went to Edinburgh for the first time playing rugby, and went to the Traverse, and it was a very spontaneous thing that happened. There was all the drama happening with Jim Haynes and the Board.

**Nancy:** Oh, I see.

**David:** There was... in between Jim Haynes and Max Stafford Clark, there was another director.

**Nancy:** Yes, who was that? I don't know.

**David:** I should know this. He ran the Guildford School of Acting for a while.

**Nancy:** Oh, it was Gordon... McDougall.

**David:** Gordon McDougall, that's right.

**Nancy:** Gordon McDougall later ran the Oxford Playhouse and my husband ran it with him.

**David:** I did a play there when I was at Oxford.

**Nancy:** Oh my god, really?

**David:** Yeah, I did *Ghetto* by Joshua Sobol.

**Nancy:** Well, my husband produced that at the National. At the time we got very close to Joshua Sobol.

**David:** He came to see it, and there were people from that production who came to see our show at the Oxford Playhouse. I had an embarrassing moment. You know the stage is raked, and I carried on a salami and I dropped the salami and it rolled down the stage so the entire audience was focused on the salami rolling down the stage. One of my finer moments, but what can you do. I was twenty years old.

**Nancy:** What a play to do. See, this was *Antigone*. This is what the script looked like. In those days we all took turns typing up bits of it.

**David:** For me this sort of thing is really invaluable.

**Nancy:** Luckily, years ago, I put it all into here. This is all we've got, this is all we have. We don't have anything else. But, these are some of the people who were in it. This was somebody who worked with the People Show a lot. And, you can see they're very amateur photographs. Here's a picture, that's Stephen Rea there. This is a picture of *Antigone*, and the costumes were just made out of Army surplus clothing, all dyed oxblood red. That's ... That was *Alternatives*. That's Stephen Rea. Dina in the Irene Fornes play. But then you see, this suddenly this is because... what's her name? It got into *Vogue* magazine. I'm just trying to think how that happened. I think it was because somebody knew... Beth knew somebody who wrote an article about us. But unfortunately it looks like the copy's gone. Where is this?

**David:** *Vogue* would probably have archives of it.

**Nancy:** This is... I think it was *Vogue*. Yes, so you would be... so I saved all these things, like this is how we created *Antigone*. So, you can just see how I've really taken it apart and getting rid of bits, and then somebody else would write another bit. Everybody was writing bits, and then we put it all together. It's a rather wonderful thing to have, isn't it?

**David:** Absolutely.

**Nancy:** Not that anyone would do it again... I managed to keep all that together. So, if you want to have a... For some reason the other part of this article which was about us, because that's me, and that's the guy who wrote Mr Jello, and that's Bette's boyfriend, and that's the actors doing some kind of exercise. And I seem to have lost the copy that went with it.

**David:** I could contact *Vogue*. They must have a copy.

**Nancy:** Well, I bet it's in here. I bet if you look through, it probably is in here somewhere... This I think was at the Young Vic. We were the first company to appear at the Young Vic. That's the *Duchess of Malfi*. Once again the clothes were all made out of Army surplus and bandages I think. And, these are just lots of photos. Because *Antigone*, we did get sent all over. We went to the Venice Biennale, we went to the Edinburgh Festival, we were sent to Munich. *Antigone* was one of those productions that kept coming back. The British Council kept sending us abroad. It was very thrilling. So, shall I let you just look at this stuff, and if you can decide whether you want to come back and have a look at it again.

**David:** I don't want to be a bother, if you guys...

**Nancy:** No, it's okay. As long as you're in this room, you're not in my way. Because I'm... see here, we did at the Traverse, what were we doing here? We did this thing that I'm not that happy about called *Beowulf*. That was a little bit, that was not very... that was after I had a baby. That wasn't a very successful show...

**David:** Is there a certain amount of risk in this kind of production. Well, I suppose in any theatrical endeavour there is a certain amount of risk, but in devising these kinds of works, I mean it could potentially be a spectacular failure. Is there...?

**Nancy:** Well, I think that was the problem, because when the Arts Council got involved they said, oh you know, we want to give you money but you have to tour for as many weeks as you rehearse. So we rehearse something for three months, we rehearsed *Beowulf* for three months. It wasn't really any good, and we had to tour it for three months, we had no choice.

And after a while it was like this terrible treadmill, we had to tour these shows that weren't worth touring. Whereas when we started, it was more that you did something, people got excited about it and then a tour emerged. So, it really became too much of a treadmill, which is why I actually finally bowed out, because I just couldn't keep it going. I found it really difficult.

**David:** I'm finding with public subsidy that there's a certain compromise. It's consistent with the Traverse and many other examples, that with the public subsidy there is the conventional kind of administrative structure that the organisational basis on which the art is made, is made conventional and there's something that's lost, a kind of anarchic ethos is gone.

**Nancy:** Well, not only that, but in my case, because I've been running Shared Experience for twenty years, and our biggest problem was that our office space got so expensive, we had to have so many computers, we had to send people on training courses, we had to pay pensions, we had to have insurance. We seemed to go through thousands of pounds worth of paper and.... The overheads were enormous and we weren't doing enough work to justify it. It was just eating up the grant. It really is a problem. And recently they gave a lot of money to a lot of companies that didn't have money. Like they gave money to, it's a very physical company, called Punchdrunk. And it was interesting, because when it was announced that Punchdrunk had suddenly got this big grant, all the theatre people were saying, oh now they're going to have to pay people, that'll be interesting. Because, of course, once they have to pay people, they won't be able to have the same sort of shows, because the money won't go far enough. But, when they weren't paying anyone, they could get twenty or thirty people to come in and, you know, or even more. You know, they could do all kinds of things, they could go into overtime. You know, we were practically destroyed by overtime on one of the shows that we did, because it was such a big production and we had to pay so much overtime. So, you're absolutely right...

**David:** It's very interesting. Because to get public funding you have to be transparent, you have to have a certain administrative structure, you can't be disorganised...

**Nancy:** This is the sort of thing that would happen. This was what was so thrilling. This was Zurich. That was two shows. That was what was so exciting about... do you know all the companies that were in this festival? Teatre Libre, Living Theatre, La MaMa in New York, Cirque du Soleil, the Playhouse of the Ridiculous, Theatre National Strasbourg, Chelsea Theatre Centre, Bread and Puppet, and Open Theatre. Either they were all in that festival or they came in different years that I don't know. There's your history. What year is it? It doesn't say, does it?

**David:** Is it 71, the year 71.

**Nancy:** Yeah, the year 71. So it was very exciting, imagine, to be plucked out. But I always thought I was really very lucky, that I was one of the few people that was doing it, because I think if I'd come from New York the competition of the Open Theatre and the Living Theatre, I don't think I could have competed with that. Whereas, somehow... this is the Arts Council. This was when we got the John Whiting award for New Writing for *Antigone*, which was really funny, because nobody actually read it. Somebody writing from Germany, asking us to drop the ending.... of the play.

**David:** Some sort of producer or just someone who saw...?

**Nancy:** Somebody in the audience.

**David:** How about that. Did you find your work provoked?

**Nancy:** It wasn't that extraordinary. I mean people like Pip Simmons were doing massive nudity and simulated sex. Our work was very expressionistic but it wasn't provocative. I think the reason this came up was that at the end of the play we had this sequence where, because the body wasn't buried, as the body of the young man wasn't buried, the actresses took turns being the body at the front of the stage. And when Antigone came on she buried him by throwing bits of newspaper over him. And at the end of the play, we had this box of this newspaper, and the audience were invited to come and take handfuls and bury the body just by throwing newspaper of it. And in England very few people would get up to do it, but in Germany they all got up to do it, they took it very very seriously. And this person thought it was very offensive. Here's a young man after the play saying to give to his girlfriend he would like to have applauded for hours if the end had not been that way. You may have remembered a man in the audience shouting about why you were covering the imaginary Polynices with those little paper pieces. He asked, need a match? Why don't you at future performances make it a great play by just dropping the end. So, that's about as controversial as we got. We didn't have... we weren't swallowing flames and we weren't... Pip Simmons' people were flame throwing, they were having mass stimulated sex, they were...

**David:** They were throwing faeces or something at the audience?

**Nancy:** They might have been. We weren't anyway near as provocative as that. And now these are just reviews of when we went to Germany.

**David:** How did you find the reception in Germany as opposed to England? I mean you were just describing it a little bit but...

**Nancy:** Well, you know I wasn't always there, because I was at the one... I did go to that one in Berlin and they loved the show. But then after that we took, we did a production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, which was only partially successful. We did take that to certain German cities, people seemed to like it but I actually wasn't crazy about it...

**David:** What do you mean by successful? How would you...

**Nancy:** I just don't think we brought it off. I think we were trying so hard to be experimental and we were trying so hard to break some sort of a mould, and to go somewhere people hadn't gone, and to deconstruct and... And you know we didn't have a writer to help us do it, so in some ways it was very naïve. Because with the *Antigone* Peter Hulton had come along and he had helped us. But with the *The Duchess of Malfi* we were doing it on our own, and because everybody is trying to do everything on their own, and reinvent the wheel, and I really needed a writer to work with and I didn't have one, so I think that finally... I don't know, it's interesting because there was an academic who was writing a book about Jacobean theatre, from Leicester University. And she told me she singled out our production as the one that she thought actually captured the essence of *The Duchess of Malfi* better than any other one she'd ever seen. Which really surprised me because I just remember that we were just kind of wallowing in the material and we just didn't know quite how to shape it, and we didn't know how to... we were trying to deconstruct and, I don't... you know...

**David:** Art is subjective, so you never know what people are going to see in it.

**Nancy:** Yeah, but I suppose the thing was that *Antigone* was so successful, so lauded, that in many ways it hampers you because you can never quite hit that mark again, when people just start flocking and people were always fighting to get in and you know, there were never enough performances of it. And so it started like that, it's a bit hard, because you measure everything in terms of...

**David:** You build a sense of trying to top yourself?

**Nancy:** I guess so, yeah. It's inevitable isn't it? I don't think we really knew what we were doing. We were kind of flailing around quite a lot, just trying to...

**David:** It's interesting to hear you say that because reading it, it's very hopeful to me, it seems very linear in how things progressed and so on... reading things you know...

**Nancy:** What reading about what everyone was doing in that period, you mean?

**David:** Yeah, just how this theatre practice evolved and the new dramaturgy emerging, what we're saying, kind of breaking down of these hierarchies and so on. It's very deliberate and....

**Nancy:** Well, it is deliberate. But when you go into a room with a lot of people, and you want to, you think well I've seen the Open Theatre do these things in that show they did called *The Serpent*, and I was just dying to understand what they'd done and how they'd done it. So we'd just imitate what we'd seen in order to try and figure it out how they did it. Which is, because we didn't know how else to find out, because there wasn't that much written up about how people put these things together, or how they experimented. Or we'd just use some exercises over and over again, hoping that something was going to be revealed to us, and that it would open a door. There was never a real understanding of...

**David:** Well, a lot of art is in reaction to what came before, my understanding was that a lot of this had to do with you trying to physicalise language, a kind of mistrust of language.

**Nancy:** Yes, yeah. And to get this whole idea of physical theatre, I think that's always, that always really excites me, that idea of expressing in the physical as strongly as with words, and that's what I still do, I'm still very involved with that. That's always been my thing.

**David:** That sort of pervasive influence on contemporary theatre now...

**Nancy:** Yeah, but I think a lot of that came from America, the influence came from America. Initially. And then people started imitating it, you know. A lot of the people who started that work were foreign. There was Lindsay Kemp, now where was he from? Was he English? Do you know of him?

**David:** It rings a bell, I should know.

**Nancy:** Well, Lindsay Kemp had a company, the Lindsay Kemp Mime Company, at the same time and he went to Holland. David Bowie was one of his actors, when we were up in



Edinburgh. He was a young man... and in fact everyone always thinks that David Bowie learned all his tricks about make-up and outfits from Lindsay Kemp. Because Lindsay Kemp was very very camp, and he always used to dress himself up as a woman, do this all extraordinary performances and David Bowie was absolutely totally made...

**David:** He worked at the Arts Lab too.

**Nancy:** Yeah, he did. But was he English? That's what I'm not sure now.

**David:** Lindsay Kemp, I should know that, I'm sorry...

**Nancy:** He's part of that period. And then there was somebody... an Israeli called Naftali Yavin who had a company at the Oval House, and they did Hanke's *Offending the Audience*. Do you know that play?

**David:** I don't. I should write this down.

**Nancy:** Oh, you don't. Okay. But he was Israeli and I think he died young. But he came in with lots of these exercises. His name was Naftali Yavin. I would have thought he would be in *Disrupting the Spectacle*. And there was a play by Peter Hanke, do you know Peter Hanke?

**David:** Yes.

**Nancy:** One of his first plays was called *Offending the Audience*, and it was like four people being really unpleasant to the audience, and it was all about breaking barriers, and I...

**David:** I have *Disrupting the Spectacle*.

**Nancy:** For a long time I played with the idea of doing *Offending the Audience*, and I didn't do it in the end, but I was fascinated by it. Then, of course, there was Genet doing *The Blacks*, and you know, all of it. So much of it felt like it came from America.

**David:** And then Happenings also, the Black Mountain College, right? It was John Cage.

**Nancy:** Yes

**David:** Well, it had roots in Dada and surrealism. But it was John Cage at Black Mountain College and then it was, what's his name, Allan Kaprow, did the Happening in Edinburgh with Marowitz and they had the drama conference in 1963 and they staged the Happening.

**Nancy:** Yeah, Happenings were a big thing.

**David:** They started in New York.

**Nancy:** Do you know about Michael Kirby?

**David:** No, I should.

**Nancy:** Michael Kirby was here all the time trying to document what was going on for the *Drama Review*. You must know about the *Drama Review*.

**David:** Yeah.

**Nancy:** It was the *Tulane Drama Review* and then it became the... He was...

**David:** It was Richard Schechner.

**Nancy:** Yeah. He spent a lot of time in England with his wife, Victoria Kirby, and they would come round and interview us all, take pictures, write articles in the *Drama Review* about the way we worked. And I don't know whether he also died young but he also used to write about Happenings, and then he tried writing plays. You see there are four pages here about Natfali Yavin. He was director of Inter-Action's *The Other Company*. His tragic death in '72 was a great blow to the theatrical development of Inter-Action. That's all about him. Let me just see if these other people are in here. Michael Kirby.... That's not in here. And who was the other one I said, Michael Kirby, Naftali Yavin and, oh, Lindsay Kemp.

**David:** Lindsay Kemp.

**Nancy:** No, there's no Lindsay Kemp, I think because Lindsay Kemp must have moved to Holland around '69. But if you look him up online, you'd be surprised. Lindsay Kemp was really interesting. I'm just going to get, I think I've got one other book.

**David:** Great. Thank you.

**Nancy:** Did I mention that I was very involved with Sam Shepard as well?

**David:** We haven't really talked about it.

**Nancy:** Okay, that's a different thing, isn't it? I was just collecting these because I think Michael Kirby wrote often in these about... rehearsal procedures, the Living Theatre, The People Show, the Ridiculous Theatre Company, Robert Wilson... There you go. Victoria Nes Kirby developed The People Show in '52. So she explained Michael Kirby, on literary theatre. They must have published books where they did a lot of that, unless they always published in magazines. But this is all about the complete development to The People Show, for example.

**David:** Did Lindsay Kemp contribute to the *Encore*, on the *Encore Reader*?

**Nancy:** I don't know.

**David:** It's really great that you have all this material.

**Nancy:** Well, yeah. This is my life. This was a very exciting period. Here's something, *Directing Hanke*, Peter Hanke. Blocking diagrams of Artaud's *La Cenci*. This is the director's issue. I suppose this is the kind of thing that you would find all of these things online, if you were looking up individual articles, wouldn't you?

**David:** Yeah, doing searches on the British Library catalogue. What about the influence of Artaud?

**Nancy:** Well, I think, when we were studying all that Grotowski stuff and Artaud, you know we were all reading *Towards a Poor Theatre* and trying to understand it, and doing Grotowski exercises. I don't know whether we really understood it, but it inspired us, the idea of the poor theatre and the actor being at the centre of the work. I mean, most of my productions it's always about the fact that the magic comes from the actors, so I've never gotten heavily into video for example, because I think it swamps the actors.

**David:** Film and video is much more of an editor's medium it seems. Is it not?

**Nancy:** Yes, but in England now video is very big in performance, in theatre.

**David:** In a kind of multi-media performance?

**Nancy:** Yeah, well no, just in theatre productions. They use video a lot now, they use it as scenery, they use it in ... they have very powerful between the scenes sequences with dancers and video. Even in the most straight-laced of shows. See this is Bread and Puppet, for example. That was another influence, Bread and Puppet came here. It felt like, the influence definitely felt like it came from America, most of it. Between Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Bread and Puppet...

**David:** There was Judson Poets...

**Nancy:** Judson Poets, but they didn't come here did they?

**David:** But that was the kind of scene that was going on, in the East Village...

**Nancy:** Yeah, and all those plays, Marowitz brought Shepard over. And I got to know Shepard because I got to know his wife at the time, and I did one of his plays and he really liked what I did, so he gave me a few plays of his to premiere, so I did the premieres of a few of his plays. He didn't always see them because he wasn't flying by then, when I did the plays he wasn't in England, so he didn't see them. Robert Wilson, of course. What period was Robert Wilson? He is later, is he? He seems to be, look. Robert Wilson.

**David:** Stephan Brecht wrote about him.

**Nancy:** And he, I wasn't so aware, but I guess he must have been around. You see he was the editor, that's it, he was the editor of the *Drama Review*, Michael Kirby. So he must write in everything, whether he wrote his own books, I don't know. The mime of Jacques Lecoq. This was a very interesting period. Performance of the limits of performance. Here, look, here's the physical training at the Open Theatre. That would have been Grotowski's...

**David:** Eugenio Barba.

**Nancy:** Oh yes, that must have been Eugenio Barba. Right. Anyway, I'll leave you with this, and if you want to come back we could find a time. Would you like a fresh cup of tea?

**David:** That's okay, I'll be alright. Thanks a lot. I appreciate it.