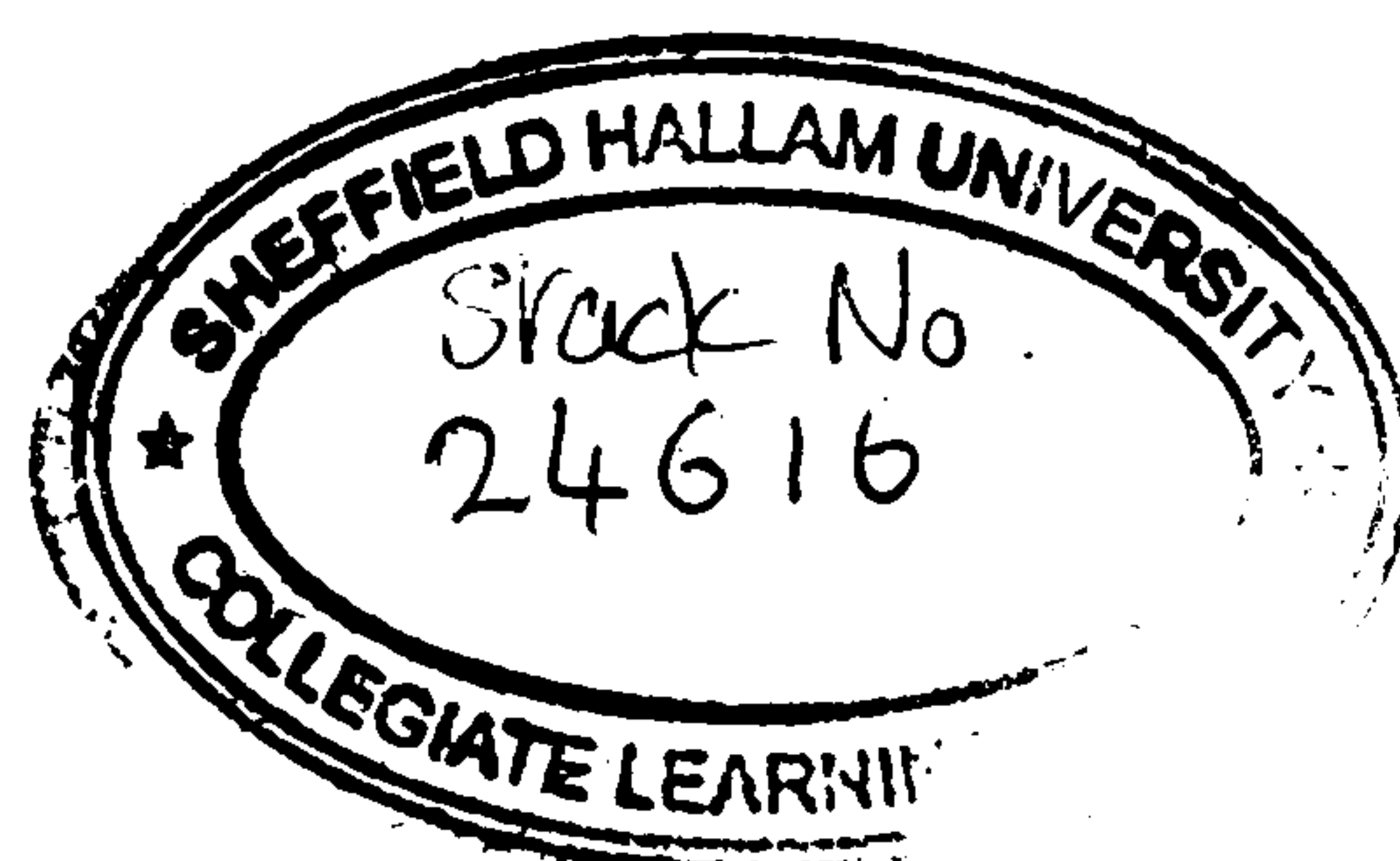


Modernisation and the New Left in Sixties Britain

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the New Left and modernisation, and to suggest that modernisation provides a powerful means of understanding the underlying dynamics of Britain's history in the 1960s. This relationship is understood in terms of a politics of space. The New Left is defined broadly for this purpose as a movement emerging from the dislocating experiences of social, cultural and physical mobility in the postwar period. What is termed the 'modernisation project' is more expansive than the technological and scientific modernisation espoused by Harold Wilson in the early 1960s and is understood to address these new, politicized forms of mobility. Whilst one element of this politics of dislocation and mobility was a concern about affluence and new forms of cultural consumption, another was concerned with the cultural and geographical dislocation of the upwardly-mobile (sometimes thought of in the language of the 'scholarship boy,' but with the growth of the student population also associated with the notion of a counterculture). The significance of an enlarged and dislocated intelligentsia is explored through the example of British Pop theory, the approach of which was to engage positively with popular culture, emphasising the value of mass-produced cultural forms which had the qualities of rawness and vitality on the one hand, and expendability on the other. British Pop theory employed pop to explore an alternative historical approach to working class culture but also suggested a different approach to upward-mobility. Contested geographies are explored through the example of New Left attitudes towards suburbia, megalopolis and the cultural geography of the North-South divide. 1968 is explored as the moment when the New Left engaged in a particular form of spatial politics: certain types of space were valued for their psychological characteristics, their sociological inaccessibility to the manipulative power of capitalism, and their capacity to liberate the subject from new forms of alienation. The spaces of New Left protest in 1968 are then compared to other examples of radical space based on radical architecture theory. The politics of the barricade are compared to the politics of indeterminacy.

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Introduction

The New Left in Britain had its origins in the late 1950s and emerged in the context of post-war social dislocation and restructuring. Whereas conventional accounts of the New Left tend to emphasise its origins in certain, key political events (Suez, the 20th Congress in the Soviet Union, the invasion of Hungary) the focus here will be on its novel political forms (primarily the dislocating experience of social, cultural and physical mobility, given a political dimension) which were a consequence of the post-war social ferment. Whereas modernisation is frequently understood in its early sixties Wilsonian form (advances in technology, the 'white heat' of the scientific revolution) the sense here will be of a broadly defined modernisation project, addressing precisely those new, politicised forms of mobility which were the context for the New Left's emergence.

The approach taken here will not be comprehensive in its discussion of the New Left and the key texts with which it is associated. The thesis is primarily concerned with those theorists of the New Left who were interested in the strategic possibilities of modernisation, not those whose political orientation was towards older forms of left politics. Thus, the work of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams are discussed within the thesis but not that of E.P. Thompson. The criteria of selection is not intended to suggest that a figure such as Thompson is unimportant but its aim, rather, is to explore the relationship between some sections of the New Left and the politics of modernisation. However, because the New Left will be defined far more broadly than is often the case, some individuals will fall within the scope of this thesis whose presence might seem unusual, for example Reyner Banham, an architectural and design historian, and other pop theorists, none of whom had formal connection to left politics. Banham and other pop theorists are important because their discussions provide access to a suppressed narrative of the sixties New Left which gives weight to the popular and the visual, themes which are vital in debates about modernisation. It is hoped that in the course of the thesis the value of a broad definition of the New Left, which at the same time focuses upon particular

themes and issues around modernisation, space and popular culture, will become apparent.

The relationship of the New Left to oppositional culture (or the counterculture) was complex, but unless a very narrow definition of each is adopted (the counterculture understood as activities around the underground press; the New Left defined in terms of particular journals and intellectuals, for example) then the connections are self-evident; in fact it is helpful not to regard these as separate entities at all, an approach which is facilitated by making the New Left's relationship to space and mobility the focus. One of the themes throughout is that the culture of New Left politics in the 1960s was largely concerned with problems of dislocation, definable in terms of competing spaces and landscapes of proximity and mobility.

A key theme throughout is the contentious relationship of the New Left to popular culture. Whereas approaches which take Richard Hoggart as a representative New Left figure would suggest a narrow and conservative attitude towards contemporary popular culture, the argument here will be that a broadly defined New Left was deeply engaged with the popular. This does not mean an attitude of uncritical acceptance but it does indicate that contemporary popular cultural forms, and the experience of social, cultural and physical mobility which were their context, were fully engaged with.

The historical literature concerned with Britain in the 1960s is not extensive, nor is it especially well developed in the particular focus of this study. A number of previous accounts of the sixties will be surveyed in this introduction. What has characterised some accounts of the sixties has been an emphasis on the decade as cultural object and the product of (changing) cultural memory. Arthur Marwick's *The Sixties*¹ rejects such approaches but, whilst a serious attempt to chart the history of the decade, it is somewhat simplistic in its approach to the New Left and shows no interest in exploring the latter's relationship to new forms of mobility. Sociology and the multi-disciplinary approaches of cultural

¹ Marwick 1998

studies have provided a better foundation for this study and relevant work by Stuart Hall, Bernice Martin and Alan Sinfield will be briefly surveyed below. No study of the politics of space in the sixties could ignore Henri Lefebvre and whilst there will be no detailed survey of Lefebvre's work at this stage there will be numerous references to his work throughout.

Whilst the relationship of the New Left to the counterculture, in the context of sixties cultural ferment, is contentious, the problem of interpretation is compounded by historiographical questions, bound-up with ideas of popular memory and the status of the sixties as a cultural object as well as a segment of historical time. To argue that the sixties is a cultural object is to suggest that it has meaning in terms of the specific concerns of the present (as well as the residual meanings associated with earlier presents). The meaning of such an object is contested, not necessarily because the accuracy of an account might be questioned on the basis of better historical research. The point has been made by Baxendale and Pawling in their study, *Narrating the Thirties*. They argue that "the mere mention of a decade ('the Sixties'; 'the Twenties') evokes powerful shared (or sometimes contested) meanings."² Historical moments become cultural objects not through the activities of professional historians (alone) but are constructed and reconstructed in the work of film-makers, novelists, journalists, and politicians, the representations of which then interact with the memories and beliefs of individuals. It is a complex process of interaction because private memories and beliefs are frequently constructed *through* a cultural object (a particular style of clothing, a piece of music, a film or TV programme.)

This is especially significant with respect to the sixties because its meaning has been contested since before the decade ended. Furthermore, if the sixties might be considered a myth, it was a myth which had its source in the sixties. There are powerful interpretative narratives at work in promoting this view of the sixties and they had their origins in the decade itself. Christopher Booker's *The*

² Baxendale and Pawling 1996 p1

*Neophilliacs*³ interprets the sixties as the explosion of a collective fantasy, of which the counterculture was the most obvious manifestation. A former editor of *Private Eye* who subsequently experienced a Christian conversion, Booker interpreted the emergence of the alternative culture as an outbreak of Romanticism, the infantilism of which he contrasted to a sober and enduring respect for authority (which he now approved of) remaining embedded in British culture. Reality returned abruptly for Booker in 1965 with the death, and subsequent funeral, of Winston Churchill.

In their introduction to *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed provide a survey of the various, politically charged readings of the 1960s which were to culminate in the moment of Thatcherism.⁴ The authors refer to the earliest, optimistic vision of the sixties, a media constructed composite “evoking material prosperity, cultural innovation and youthful rebellion,”⁵ an image which was represented in the *Time* ‘Swinging London’ issue of April 1966. The intention of the essays collected in the book was to move away from such conventional views of the decade and consider instead a more complex history, in particular to see the counterculture not just as a “hippie cult with its vocabulary of love and peace, its ambience of marijuana and sitar music,” but in a more nuanced way which might take into account its political dimension, stressing the diversity of cultural opposition and the myriad of locations, spaces and issues within which and around which it cohered.

This is the objective of the book but Moore-Gilbert and Seed also recognise the continued significance of myths created in the decade itself which have subsequently acquired a very powerful, politically-charged resonance. Mary Whitehouse was a significant figure in the promotion of a view of the 1960s which would eventually be incorporated into Thatcherite rhetoric. Whitehouse had condemned the decade for silencing the voice of the respectable majority and for the way in which the avant-garde “flooded our culture and our society

³ Booker 1970

⁴ Moore-Gilbert and Seed 1992a

⁵ Moore-Gilbert and Seed 1992b p1

with its dirty water, churning up its foundations, overturning standards, confusing thought and leaving in its wake an all too obvious trail of insecurity and misery.”⁶

It is significant that Whitehouse identified the silent (or *silenced*) majority as the victims of sixties permissiveness, and the avant-garde as the predator. Moore-Gilbert and Seed cite Malcolm Bradbury’s *The History Man*, a novel which has been read as an authoritative account of the state of Britain’s higher education in the late 1960s, which represented its anti-hero as “cynical and meretricious in every aspect of his life.”⁷ the archetypal ‘trendy leftie.’ Although Bradbury was of a different political hue to Whitehouse he nevertheless arrives at a similar interpretation of sixties radicalism.

Thatcher had skilfully represented the 1960s as a period of great significance, the moment when discipline collapsed and moral values were threatened, when trade union power and the ‘nanny’ state had undermined freedom. Thatcherite rhetoric was also skilful in associating this ruinous situation with the left imagined in a way not dissimilar to Bradbury’s Howard Kirk. Norman Tebbit had attacked “the insufferable, smug, sanctimonious, naïve, guilt-ridden, wet, pink orthodoxy of that sunset home of the third-rate minds of that third-rate decade, the sixties.”⁸

These negative representations of the 1960s have a significant element in common: the apparent connection between left politics (of the new type), challenges to cultural and moral authority, and class. One might recoil from the sentiment expressed by Mary Whitehouse, and Norman Tebbit’s statement may be belligerent and offensive, but the connection was grounded in real processes of social dislocation and cultural radicalism. Underlying this connection was also the association of sixties radical cultural politics with a changing class structure. Britain during the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the expansion of the lower middle class through the growth of various service professions, accompanied by an

⁶ Moore-Gilbert and Seed 1992b p2 Whitehouse quoted in Tracy and Morrison 1979 p152

⁷ Moore-Gilbert and Seed 1992b p3

⁸ Norman Tebbit from the 1985 Disraeli Lecture, cited in Moore-Gilbert and Seed 1992b p2

increasing division between members of this new (or progressive) middle class fraction and those in traditional occupations.

Thatcherism might have given this particular myth of the 1960s its most powerful voice but it resonates in a wider variety of responses to the decade. The complexity of the process whereby historical memory becomes cultural object can be illustrated by reference to a review, from 1998, of two recently published books about the sixties: Jonathon Green's *All Dressed Up*⁹ and



Arthur Marwick's *The Sixties*.¹⁰ The content of the review is of less interest in this context than the accompanying photograph and its caption, which reads: "We all want to change the world... Hippies sign a petition to restore the death penalty."¹¹ The circumstances this

photograph purports to describe are, significantly, not referred to in either book.

Two aspects of Horwell's review are particularly interesting. Firstly, there is a strong measure of cynicism and irony in this view of sixties hippiedom. It is implied that the conventional view of hippies as committed to peace and love (and, *ipso facto*, opposed to the death penalty) needs to be undercut. Whilst this conventional view does persist in popular memory, there was an opposing view, however, which has its origins in the sixties decade. Horwell's viewpoint, furthermore, can only be demonstrated by means of a textual anchor, the image (which is of individuals who might be described using a different term than 'hippie') seeming to be an illustration of the description in the caption. The key

⁹ Green 1998

¹⁰ Marwick 1998

¹¹ Horwell 1998

word is “hippies”, a term which for those who have a cynical attitude towards the 1960s is loaded with meaning, arguably in this instance signifying the superficial and hypocritical nature of sixties rebellion.

In fact the photograph was first published in the *Evening Standard* on 3rd October 1967 and the original caption read: “Two hippies in London's King's Road signing a petition advocating the reinstatement of the death penalty, two years after the abolition of capital punishment.”¹² Whereas the counterculture had existed in a visible form since the late 1950s, the word hippie had only appeared in the mid 1960s and was associated with the merger of some specific signifiers of a bohemian lifestyle with those of a radical political stance, a convergence which was partially the creation of the media and the activities of the state. In Britain, drugs (as well as obscenity) became a focus of anxiety, arrests for possession of cannabis sharply increasing in 1966, culminating in the arrest and imprisonment of John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins at the end of December 1966 and the infamous arrest of Mick Jagger and others in February 1967. These activities by the police were also accompanied by an hysterical media campaign which had the effect of giving the counterculture an identity it may not have originally possessed. Hence the *Evening Standard* article/photo which both referred to a myth which the media had played its part in constructing and disseminating, whilst simultaneously exposing it as a myth.

It should be noted that a degree of scepticism with respect to the sincerity of many participants has been frequently expressed by participants themselves, a view shared by Green as well as John Lennon:

“The people who are in control and in power and the class system and the whole bullshit bourgeois scene is exactly the same except that there is a lot of middle class kids with long hair walking around London in trendy clothes and Kenneth Tynan’s making a fortune out of the word ‘fuck.’ But apart from that, nothing happened except that we all dressed up.”¹³

¹² gettyimages.com: Image #3398269

Lennon's statement provided the source for the title of Green's book: *All Dressed Up*.

Arthur Marwick's *The Sixties* is a substantial historical account of the decade which in part is motivated by methodological concerns. Marwick acknowledges that periodisation is a tool employed by historians in order to make sense of a past otherwise too extensive and complex for effective analysis. A period, such as the sixties, does not have "any immanent or natural existence."¹⁴

Nevertheless, the period one constructs for such analytical purposes is not entirely arbitrary and Marwick considers there to be strong evidence that "the sixties' [is] of outstanding historical significance in that what happened during this period transformed social and cultural developments for the rest of the century."¹⁵ Not considered, however, are the forces at work which lead to the representation of the sixties as a (contested) cultural object, the idea that this particular decade has meaning not just in terms of 'what really happened' but also as a view of the past shaped by specific, and competing, concerns in the present.

No doubt Marwick would argue that the latter concerns are precisely the kind of thing he objects to and indeed motivated him to write the book. Marwick is emphatic that the activities of the professional historian are scientific in character and are grounded in objective procedures, a consideration of "the evidence provided by a range of primary sources, analysed with the professional techniques of the historian, and then reflected on at length, and discussed and argued over with colleagues."¹⁶ Such a defence of the historian's objectivity reminds one of E.H. Carr's statement that "accuracy is a duty, not a virtue."¹⁷ Yes, the historian must not make fast and loose with the facts and there are procedures which should ensure that the object produced meets exacting professional standards, but a process of selection also occurs which is not entirely determined by the content of the archive.

¹³ Cited in Wenner 1962 pp11-12

¹⁴ Marwick 1998 p5

¹⁵ Marwick 1998 p5

¹⁶ Marwick 1998 p21

¹⁷ Carr 1982 p8. Citation from Housman

Marwick's other principal objective is to recover the historical experience of the 1960s from its distortion within Marxism and cultural studies. Marwick is far from negative with respect to the cultural challenges of the 1960s but is unwilling at the same time to take the revolutionary rhetoric of cultural radicals seriously. Marwick promotes the idea that the sixties counterculture was:

"imbued with the entrepreneurial, profit-making ethic. I am thinking here of boutiques, experimental theatres, art galleries, discotheques, night-clubs, 'light shows', 'head shops', photographic and model agencies, underground films, pornographic magazines."¹⁸

Marwick accepts that this is not an original suggestion and acknowledges a similar argument promoted by Ian MacDonald in his *Revolution in the Head*.¹⁹ But Marwick is extremely resistant to any suggestion that the counterculture's commercial activities were a sign of bad faith or hypocrisy, that "nothing very much happened, [or that] It was all just froth and spectacle,"²⁰ the latter being a view he associates with "the disillusioned revolutionaries, the extreme left."²¹ Marwick then engages in an intemperate discourse against proponents of "The Great Marxisant Fallacy" and Herbert Marcuse in particular."²²

The problem with the Marxists was that they interpreted new forms of consumerism as social control. Marcuse himself had devised the concept of "repressive tolerance," suggesting that establishment liberalism in response to demands for more freedom "was no more than a cunning way of keeping revolutionary sentiment and radical protest under control, while appearing to be tolerant."²³ Marxists, in their pursuit of a fundamental revolutionary upheaval, missed the fact that another sort of revolution was occurring, a "transformation

¹⁸ Marwick 1998 p13

¹⁹ MacDonald 1994 pp28-30

²⁰ Marwick 1998 p4

²¹ Marwick 1998 p4

²² Marwick 1998 p10; p14

²³ Marwick 1998 p14

in material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships, and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people.”²⁴

Marwick does argue that many in the counterculture were at the forefront of initiating these transformations, but they did not confront society, as many believed they were, but “permeated and transformed it,” and they were aided in this by those within the establishment, in authority, who “responded flexibly to countercultural demands,” who in fact exercised “measured judgement,” as Marwick termed it.²⁵

Marwick identifies a whole range of characteristics of the era which the book subsequently explores, and since this is a comparative study of Britain, France, Italy and the USA the empirical material he has to process is vast and difficult to generalise upon; his wholesale repudiation of the conceptual apparatus that might have made more sense of it all is a little baffling, however, and this has a debilitating effect on his ability to provide a sophisticated analysis of the objects he is studying. Theory is dismissed either by appeals to common sense in the face of the staggering weight of Marxist 'tosh' (one of his asides ridicules the apparent emphasis placed by Marxist revolutionaries on: “the theory of the dialectic... there is no more evidence for the existence of ‘the dialectic’ than there is for the existence of ‘the holy ghost.’”²⁶), or through humorous caricature. Consider the following:

“What I am definitely not prepared to do is adopt the stance of the metaphysicians, Marxists and cultural theorists and tell you that the songs of the Beatles form part of a discourse which prevents blacks and workers from demanding their rights, that Antonioni’s film *Blow Up* is constructed to persuade everyone that they live in the happiest of all possible worlds, and that the miniskirts of Mary Quant are ‘texts’ designed to make women resign themselves to bourgeois patriarchy.”²⁷

²⁴ Marwick 1998 p15

²⁵ Marwick 1998 p13

²⁶ Marwick 1998 p12

The Sixties is a lengthy comparative study of sixties cultural transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States and, Marwick's professional techniques notwithstanding, it is highly selective in its approach, inevitably because of the vast range of source material that had to be considered. Marxism, cultural studies and theory in general are given great prominence in the introduction, cited as illustrations of the outlandish nature of sixties intellectual activity, but also, we presume, of the ways in which the decade was, and continues to be, misinterpreted. The chapter that subsequently deals with these matters in greatest detail²⁸ has some difficulty establishing a focus. There are short biographies of the leading French theorists: Sartre, Levis-Strauss, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and Eco appear, as well as other luminaries. That Existentialism was superseded by Structuralism in the 60s is alluded to but not seriously discussed, except to imply that it was a matter of fashion, or that "perhaps there wasn't such a difference."²⁹ Despite the attention given to France and the critical events of 1968, there is no consideration of either Debord or Lefebvre: the former is briefly referred to in the introductory chapter, the latter possibly confused with the historian George Lefebvre by Marwick in a citation from Cohn-Bendit.³⁰

Despite the accumulation of detail, there is a frustrating insufficiency of detail where one might want it. Marwick interestingly notes that in Britain structuralism was limited in its impact until the end of the decade and that Existentialism continued to have an influence,³¹ but without further explanation. Britain is only one of Marwick's case studies, admittedly, but it surely warrants a more considered discussion of the relationship of theory to the development of the New Left, which need not be a defence of Marcuse, nor of theories connecting new popular cultural forms to social control.

²⁷ Marwick 1998 p21

²⁸ With the unwieldy title: "Pushing Paradigms to Their Utmost Limits' or 'Creative Extremism': Structuralism, Conceptualism and Indeterminacy" Marwick 1998 pp288-358

²⁹ Marwick 1998 p303

³⁰ It is a quotation from Daniel Cohn-Bendit: "... Some read Marx of course, perhaps Bakunin, and of all the moderates, Althusser, Mao, Guevara, Lefebvre [Marxist historian]..." The square brackets would suggest that this is Marwick's own comment. But surely Cohn-Bendit was referring to the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, not the historian George Lefebvre? Marwick 1998 p293

³¹ Marwick 1998 p293

Every account of the sixties is the product of its own particular circumstances, even those determined to suggest otherwise, and one might speculate that the emphatic stance which Marwick takes against cultural theory has some relationship to its influence in Britain subsequent to the decade in question. It is easy to ridicule the 'everything is a text' stance but does this caricature really represent the summative impact of cultural studies since the 1960s? For example, John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism*³² is an exemplary study of the British New Wave in film in the 1960s and it is significant that Marwick's own discussion of this movement makes no reference to it. Hill's discussion of the New Wave places it in the context of prevailing attitudes towards popular culture and suggests, amongst other things, that its negative representation of new modes of consumption might be bound up with the attitude of the audience the film was aimed at (the progressive intelligentsia). It is a sensitive and historically informed study which, nevertheless, uses textual analytical tools derived from Barthes. This is an approach which Marwick has no interest in.

More recent books about the decade seem to promote the banal view that most people in Britain in the sixties were largely unaffected by radical cultural transformation. The most recent account, too recent to have been thoroughly considered here, (I draw all of the following from the book's preface) maintains that the sixties in Britain was a period of "fundamental continuity" with earlier periods, that it was "more complicated, diverse and contradictory" than is usually acknowledged.³³ The author suggests that:

"the phenomena that we often take as shorthand for the sixties were not universally popular. People rarely remember that the soundtracks of *The Sound of Music* and *South Pacific* comfortably outsold any of the Beatles albums of the decade..."³⁴

³² Hill 1986

³³ Sandbrook 2005 ppxi - xix

³⁴ Sandbrook 2005 pxix

This is not a very original observation and Sandbrook does not appear to have consulted Dave Harker's discussion of pop in the sixties, where it had earlier been made.³⁵ Sandbrook makes these types of comparison because, he says:

"to borrow the famous phrase of the historian E.P. Thompson, this book sets out to rescue 'from the enormous condescension of posterity' - as well as the enormous condescension of innumerable historians – the lives of the kind of people who spent the 1960s in Aberdeen or Welshpool or Wolverhampton, the kind of people for whom mention of the sixties might conjure up memories not of *Lady Chatterley*, the Pill and the Rolling Stones, but bingo, Blackpool and Berni Inns."³⁶

From Veronica Horwell's review of the books written by Marwick and Green to Dominic Sandbrook's account published early this year (2005), one finds the desire to consider the sixties in terms of ordinary people, and the inference that the historical object we currently possess does no such thing, it being the narrative of a small, privileged and deluded minority. Clearly, though, it is a little more complicated than that.

What the above seems to suggest is that when the sixties are narrated and derided in periodic attempts to recover it as an historical experience, there is in such accounts an underlying assumption concerning popular experience. The complex question of defining that which is popular is rarely addressed in any depth, however, but there is a persistent scepticism about the motives and activities of the counterculture and the New Left: they may have looked as if they were challenging authority on behalf of the people, goes the narrative, but they were insincere, hypocritical and, in any case, the people did not want to be liberated in that particular way.

There is, therefore, an inbuilt scepticism about the sixties, the implication being that even to consider the decade as having any historical coherence is to make a dangerous concession to a media myth. As Horwell states:

³⁵ Harker 1992 p241

“I don’t believe in the sixties... I’m sceptical of theories of the period, most of which seem to be later rationales for a collective delusion – shared by those who were young then and doing nicely thank you.”³⁷

A more complex response can be found in Kobena Mercer’s essay which is concerned with the problem of periodising the sixties. The essay was written in response to a number of accounts published in 1988 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 1968 events, particularly Ronald Fraser’s *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*,³⁸ David Caute’s *The Year of the Barricades*³⁹ and Tariq Ali’s *Street Fighting Years*.⁴⁰ Mercer’s objection to these accounts is that they attempt to give a particular moment and the activities of a specific social group a more general and universal meaning. Mercer complains about the predominant tone of “nostalgia for the good old days when the good old boys could act out their heroic identities as student revolutionaries,” which he characterises as “narcissistic pathos [for] the loss of authority and identity on the part of a tiny minority of privileged intellectuals.”⁴¹ The ways of remembering the 1960s associated with the aforementioned accounts is to give too much significance to the experiences of a relatively privileged minority, argues Mercer, but this is not to suggest that the decade *wasn’t* important. Mercer is actually attempting to recover the sixties on behalf of those social groups whose challenges to authority were excluded from the dominant narrative: gays, ethnic minorities, women. Mercer dislikes the narrative of the sixties which he associates with white, male, middle class revolutionaries. Unlike the naïve attempt to search for ordinary experience, evident in Sandbrook and Marwick, however, it is doubtful that Mercer would embrace the term ‘ordinary’ to describe those groups he regards as oppressed and marginalised from the dominant narrative.

³⁶ Sandbrook 2005 pxix

³⁷ Horwell 1998

³⁸ Fraser 1988

³⁹ Caute 1988

⁴⁰ Ali 1987

⁴¹ Mercer 1992 p426; p424

A number of sources have provided the foundation for the approach taken here, primarily the work of Stuart Hall, Bernice Martin and Alan Sinfield. Whilst they write from different perspectives there are a number of common themes within their work which provide an historical and conceptual framework for the study of Britain in the 1960s. These include: the growth of an expanded lower middle class and the emergence of a division between traditional and progressive fractions; the link between the New Left and the progressive middle class fraction; new terrains and spaces of engagement for the New Left intelligentsia; the connection between the latter and the politics of modernisation; the relationship of the working class to the new modes of political engagement associated with the New Left.

In 'Reformism and the Legislation of Consent'⁴² Stuart Hall considers the origins of Britain's liberalising legislation in the sixties and the reasons why that particular cycle of reform ended with the decade. The reforms in question began with the Homicide Act in 1957, subsequent to which legislation was enacted broadly relating to the enforcement of morality. There was a shift towards "a less rigid, looser, more 'permissive' moral code,"⁴³ most typically in those areas pertaining to sexuality and personal conduct. In large part the tone was set by the *Wolfenden Report* (1956-8) which established the fundamental principles that were to shape the sixties reforms.

Support for moral reform coalesced around particular social and cultural groups. Attitudes towards moral regulation (and 'permissiveness' in general) became the increasingly visible cultural reference point of a middle class divided into traditional and progressive fractions. These distinct and increasingly antagonistic social groups also revealed a disposition towards space, suggested Hall; an approach he adapted from Bernstein's study of progressive education. The progressive middle class came close in the 1960s to establishing a social hegemony, Hall argues, but the rejection of the *Wooton*

⁴² Hall 1980

⁴³ Hall 1980 p2

*Report*⁴⁴ marked the end of moral reform and was the harbinger of a different political dispensation in the seventies. It is a subtle essay which does not arrive at hurried conclusions. One significant element in the essay is Hall's discussion of the thoroughgoing and expansive character of the modernisation project as it was envisaged in the late 1950s, in comparison to the less ambitious programme implemented after 1964. The other significant element is Hall's consideration of the character of the structural changes to capitalism in the post-war period, the impact these had on the political terrain, and their importance in introducing a cultural dimension to sixties politics.

Hall argues that support for the legislation was not determined by association with one or other of the major parties and in fact the reforms had been initiated during the periods in office of two Home Secretaries: R.A. Butler from the Conservatives and Roy Jenkins from Labour. But if support for the legislation did not cohere around party lines there was evidence of polarisation into two distinctive moral climates elsewhere. In religion, for example, the more established churches tended towards reformism whilst more fundamentalist religious opinion was opposed to it. Most significant was the class basis of these religious tendencies, the established churches seemingly more identifiable with "middle class or 'gentry' society,"⁴⁵ whilst fundamentalist religion tended to be associated with the respectable working class and the traditional petit-bourgeoisie. In fact, as the sixties progressed, tensions over the pace and nature of reform found their "most powerful articulation through a split between the 'new' and the 'old' middle classes... a division into two, distinct and opposing moral – ideological formations."⁴⁶

Hall argues that the principles established in the *Wolfenden Report* and in the subsequent legislation could not be characterised as liberalising in any simple sense. The reforms tended towards the strengthening of controls and the increasing of penalties whilst at the same time allowing greater freedom and leniency where activities were considered to be a matter of private contracts

⁴⁴ This report was based on a Royal Commission which had recommended a relaxation of the laws on drugs.

⁴⁵ Hall 1980 p6

between consenting, equal partners.⁴⁷ This “double taxonomy”, as Hall describes it, tended towards modes of regulation that were “more privatised and ‘person’ focused..., tacit rather than explicit, invisible rather than visible,”⁴⁸ in some instances, a claim he supports through reference to Bernstein’s study of progressive education.

Underlying Hall’s discussion is a broader consideration of Britain in the sixties, connected to the early 1960s modernisation project. Reform of the apparatus of cultural and moral regulation had attracted support from sections of all parties, for a number of reasons. For the Conservatives their natural constituency, the old middle class, was a declining force in the 1950s as it was eroded under the impact of inflation, by “the rising managerial and new middle classes,” and by those occupied in “the growing bureaucracies of the state,” as well as by the rising spectre of the “affluent proletarian.”⁴⁹ Whilst this declining group was “affronted... by the materialism, the hedonism, the moral agnosticism and cultural fluidity of mass-consumption capitalist society,” the task of progressives in the Tory party was to make an appeal to the “new, emergent social forces of a socially mobile society.”⁵⁰

Labour revisionism was far more theoretical in its approach to modernisation. First it regarded the dynamism inherent in the new post-war capitalism as “capable of wiping away the old structures of poverty and want”⁵¹ and thus creating a more prosperous and equal society, without recourse to further nationalisation. Second, it considered that if Labour were to win a general election (a question made more urgent after the 1959 defeat), it would have to create a “new historic bloc from amongst the new managerial elites, the technical strata.”⁵² Third, whilst differing from the Labour left by rejecting an

⁴⁶ Hall 1980 p39

⁴⁷ Hall 1980 pp12-21

⁴⁸ Hall 1980 p21

⁴⁹ Hall 1980 p29

⁵⁰ Hall 1980 pp29-30

⁵¹ Hall 1980 p31

⁵² Hall 1980 p31

extension of public ownership, it differed from the right by refusing to sanction “the dismal Puritanism of an obsolescent Fabianism.”⁵³

Believing that the structural economic problems of capitalism had been solved through Keynesian intervention, Crosland, the revisionist’s most articulate spokesperson, looked forward to a thoroughly modern and modernised welfare capitalism (Americanisation, but combined with the tolerant and civilised Scandinavian model) in which significant cultural and ethical questions had also been resolved. Crosland had mounted a critique of the structures of class inequalities in Britain and supported the introduction of comprehensive education, but also saw the necessity for the deregulation of moral conduct and the encouragement of a society with wider opportunities for enjoyment and leisure: “we need not only higher exports and old-age pensions, but more open-air cafes, brighter and gayer streets at night, later closing-hours for public houses...” was how Crosland expressed it.⁵⁴

Hall considers the revisionist agenda to be one within which the programme of moral and cultural reform was not a side issue but absolutely central to the task of creating a better society now believed to be possible as a consequence of the transformation of classical capitalism. In contrast, the programme of modernisation initiated by Wilson in 1964 “pivoted more on a state-sponsored ‘scientific and technical revolution,’” the cultural and ethical impulse isolated within the Home Office reforms.⁵⁵ Harold Wilson attempted to build an electoral alliance on the same forces identified by Crosland:

“but in a different ‘mix’, and articulated through a different ideological repertoire. The period of ‘moral reformism’ was the last flicker of a disintegrating social and economic strategy. Instead of building and expanding this ‘modernist’ moral/social hegemony, the decade produced, instead, its steady polarisation into its ‘progressive’ and ‘traditionalist’ camps.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Hall 1980 p31

⁵⁴ Crosland 1964 p355

⁵⁵ Hall 1980 p35

Although only tentatively explored by Hall, he suggests that the relationship of this modernisation project to the new middle class was of some importance. The sixties was a period when the “progressive middle classes came closest to establishing a social hegemony... The programme of moral reform may have benefited many other social sectors, but it was designed in [their] image.”⁵⁷ But, the division between the traditional middle class *and* the respectable working class on the one hand, the progressive middle class on the other, was to generate a series of ideological conflicts (around law and order, education, immigration, welfare, social values, sexual mores) at the end of the 1960s.

Hall concludes his study by referring to Basil Bernstein’s essay on ‘visible and invisible pedagogies’, suggesting that Bernstein’s insights into the character of progressive education provided a model through which to understand the relationship of the progressive middle class to the field of moral reform. Bernstein had noted that cultural capital within the educational system can be transmitted and regulated through different modalities, related to different ways of framing and classifying educational knowledge. Classification related to the degree to which different curricula were separated, strong classification suggesting rigid and impervious boundaries, weak classification implying weak boundaries. Framing referred to the relationship of control between teacher and pupil, weakly framed pedagogies implying a more permissive relationship.⁵⁸ But permissiveness did not mean the absence of control, Bernstein had argued, rather a different modality of regulation:

“The form of transmission of an invisible pedagogy encourages more of the child to be made public and so more of the child is available for direct and indirect surveillance and control.”⁵⁹

In *Class, Codes and Control*, Bernstein had discussed the rules that determine different modalities of knowledge acquisition with reference to real space, specifically the type of toilet one might find in homes occupied by the

⁵⁶ Hall 1980 p36

⁵⁷ Hall 1980 p38

⁵⁸ Hall 1980 pp41-42

progressive middle class in contrast to traditional working or middle class homes. Respectable homes (occupied by the traditional middle and respectable working classes) contained toilets with doors that could be locked. These toilets exhibited strong classification and framing, being separated from other spaces by clear and distinct boundaries: in the working class home there was a lock on the toilet door, and it was used. Such arrangements were founded upon clear, understandable rules and visible authority which allowed the individual to achieve a degree of separation between public and private behaviour, and to allow moments of withdrawal from the gaze (and control) of others.⁶⁰

The toilet found in the homes of the progressive middle classes would be chaotic in comparison and to a degree multi-purpose: they might contain reading material and have posters on the wall. The door would not be locked (if it had a lock) and might even be left open to facilitate communication with others on the outside, an example of weak classification. There were no rules or visible authority, the user having to discover what was accepted practice for herself/himself, an example of weak framing.

In the progressive middle class household, use of the toilet involved embarkation on a journey of self discovery,⁶¹ a minor example of what Bernice Martin defined as “the sweet thrill of cosmic ambiguity,”⁶² a blurring of boundaries between public and private with the consequence that it was more difficult for the subject to evade the (now implicit but no less significant) control of others.

In *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*, Bernice Martin considers how the transformation of the social structure in the post-war period had affected literature, the arts, popular culture and everyday patterns of behaviour. Martin, too, detected a conspicuous class division emerging around new cultural patterns in the 1960s, but particularly emphasises the adverse consequences of

⁵⁹ Hall 1980 p42; Bernstein 1975 p135

⁶⁰ Bernstein 1975 p143

⁶¹ Bernstein 1975 p143

the progressive middle class's prominence, on those social groups occupying a radically different cultural space, the respectable working class and the traditional middle class in particular.

Martin observes that post-war levels of material prosperity combined with a “minutely differentiated division of labour” and the restructuring of social institutions and roles, had released

“people and resources from the immediate disciplines of survival so that whole populations are enabled to discover layers of ‘expressive’ needs – self-discovery and self-fulfilment, richness of personality, variety and depth of relationships – as legitimate and at least half-feasible aims.”⁶³

But this much increased desire for self-expression was unevenly distributed and the traditional working class remained largely untouched by it. The main recipients of these new expressive needs were the progressive middle classes and the most distinct manifestation of these needs was to be found in the counterculture. A substantial element within Martin's thesis is her argument that members of the new middle class appropriated what had been, primarily, a working class popular culture, but misunderstood it:

“traditional working class life is highly structured by group and grid. It is a culture of boundary and control regularly punctuated by socially programmed occasions in which excess, immediacy and the breaking of normal taboos is not merely tolerated but expected.”⁶⁴

Working class youth culture had similar characteristics to the parent culture in this respect and was first and foremost preoccupied with boundary and the maintenance of group symbolism. It was a culture of control which, nevertheless, was “interspersed with pockets of framed and *licensed* liminal

⁶² From ‘Of Infinity and Ambiguity’ in Martin 1983 p4

⁶³ Martin 1983 p16

⁶⁴ Martin 1981 p140

excess.”⁶⁵ There were obvious reasons why middle class radicals who were themselves seeking new modes of self expression should be attracted to youth culture because the period of adolescence was:

“an interlude of socially sanctioned immediacy and of relative freedom... The culture of youth is marked by spontaneity, hedonism... and a kind of self-centred emotional intensity which, from some angles, can resemble individualism, nonconformity, even rebellion.”⁶⁶

Rock music in particular seemed to demonstrate these rebellious qualities, but it had not had an immediate appeal for the middle class in the 1950s. Martin noted that “jazz, in fact, insulated middle class radicals from pop for over a decade.”⁶⁷ When middle class radicals did adopt rock music they made a fundamental mistake, however, and failed to understand its role in the lives of working class youth for which it functioned to provide group identity as part of a larger culture of collective symbolism, not the expressive individualism which was its appeal for middle class youth. Martin argues that whilst

“all social classes in the youth/pop culture are juggling with symbols of de-structuring against peer-group rituals, at the margin the progressive middle classes want the symbols of de-structuring and the working classes want the peer group rituals.”⁶⁸

Ray Gosling was an early advocate of the counterculture and had adopted a Romantic attitude towards working class youth culture, seeking out “seediness and violence as a guarantee of gut emotion and real freedom”⁶⁹ and had tried to encourage the young people he worked with to “let their liminality spill over into ‘real life’... But they remained obstinately deferential to authority and uneasy with his refusal to *be* clear-cut authority for them.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Martin 1983 p138

⁶⁶ Martin 1983 p139

⁶⁷ Martin 1983 p167

⁶⁸ Martin 1983 p167

⁶⁹ Martin 1983 p122

Martin argues that the progressive middle class's celebration of the liminoid aspects of youth culture was particularly damaging for those on the margin between the respectable and lumpen working class:

"The working class culture of control evolved precisely to make possible some degree of personal autonomy in conditions of scarcity and insecurity. One insidious effect of the popularisation of the counterculture's expressive values has been to invert the categories so as morally to stigmatise the culture of control and respectability while representing the culture of unstructured short-run hedonism as ideologically preferable."⁷¹

A considerable strength in Martin's account is that she does not distinguish between traditional working class culture and more recent cultural forms on the basis that the latter are banal or degraded. The progressive middle class appropriation of the purportedly authentic and vital within popular culture involved also a dismissal of those elements within it (most of it, in fact) considered pacifying and manipulative. Martin's repudiation of the former (the appropriation of that considered authentic) involved a rejection of the other side of the equation (that most *wasn't* authentic). This is done, however, by regarding all the ways in which the working class use popular culture, traditional or otherwise, as functioning, on balance, to maintain group solidarity rather than to express individuality.

Unfortunately, group solidarity is also given a conservative inflexion in the form of a cultural authority she sees as the foundation of a functioning society and as providing an indispensable sense of security and continuity for most people. Martin's approach is similar to Christopher Booker's in this respect.

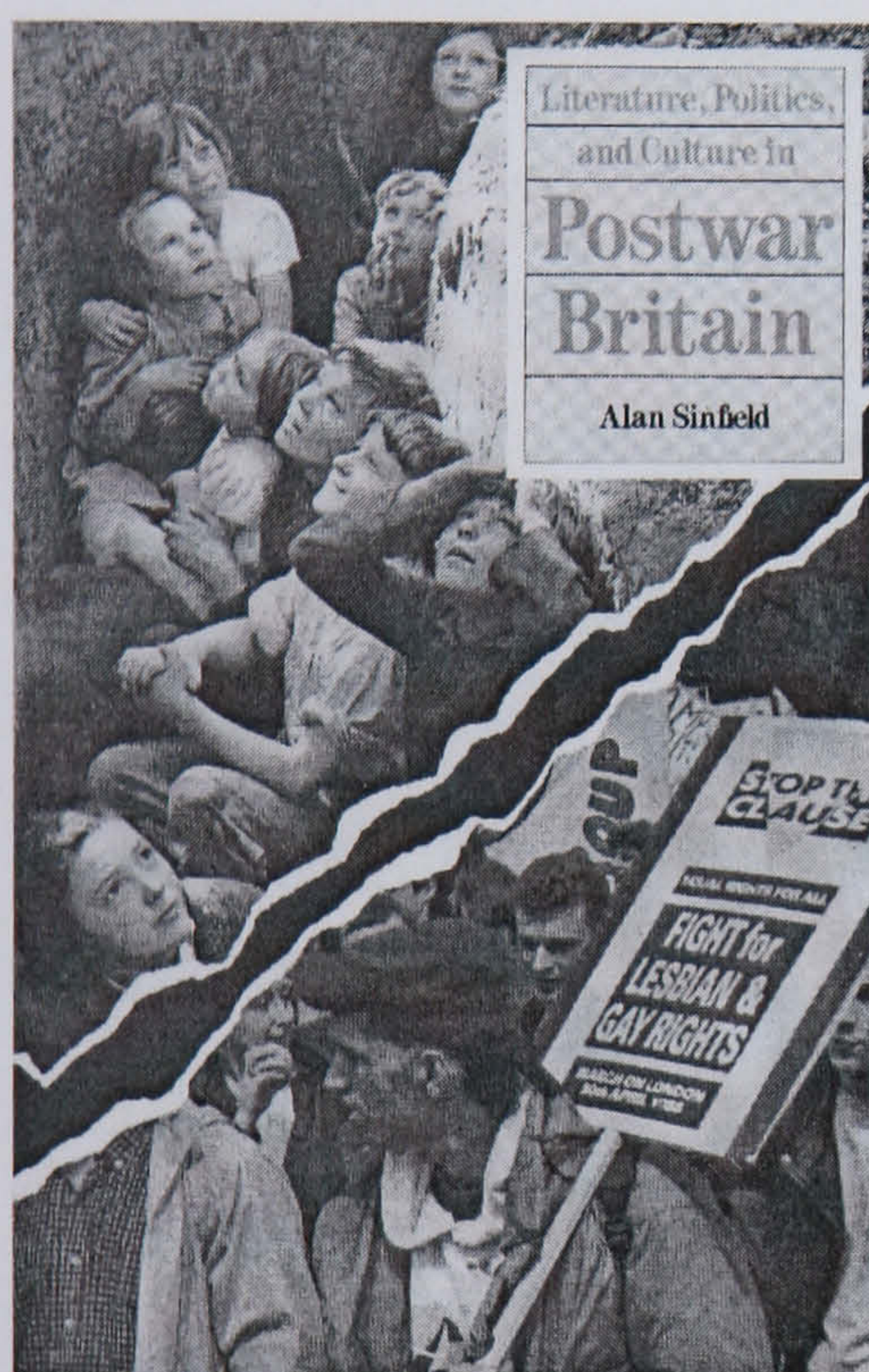
Martin regards the attack on a whole range of restrictions: "the laws of bastardy, the rules which determine entitlement to unemployment pay and social security benefits" as concerned with allowing "deviant groups to choose and justify their

⁷⁰ Martin 1983 pp122-123

⁷¹ Martin 1983 p215

own lifestyle.”⁷² This judgement appears harsh. Martin defends these structures of authority on the grounds that they benefit those who have managed to achieve a level of respect and autonomy but also because they provide at least an opportunity for the underclass to achieve some degree of security and prosperity.

On the front cover of Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* are represented severed halves of different photographs, juxtaposed as if they are components of the same image. At the top is a fragment of a photograph of some children sheltering in a trench during the Battle of Britain



over the hop fields of Kent in 1940; below is an image of the 'stop the clause 28 march', from 30th April 1988. This vividly defines one way of reading the faultline in Britain's post-war history: on one side the War, the sense of a common struggle, the representation of everyday life and the promise of 1945; on the other side the struggle against oppression, *still*, but now in circumstances when the post-war consensus had collapsed. But what lay in between these two moments? The failure of the post-war settlement to be inclusive was partly a

consequence of the long tradition of middle class dissidence which was one of its foundations. The dissenting middle class with its origins in the 19th century could be left-wing, right-wing or of no political complexion but a common characteristic was its Romantic hostility to the dominant business oriented fraction within the bourgeoisie.

Sinfield detects what he believes to be the broken promise of the post-war settlement, in the early 1940s. The essence of this can be found in Richard Hillary's autobiography, *The Last Enemy*, published in 1942. Hillary was a public school educated fighter pilot whose experience of the war gave him an acute sense of the prevailing social injustices within British society but the

⁷² Martin 1983 p216

ultimate conclusion of the book is shaped by a view expressed by one of his friends, a humane, Tory idealist who, passing through the industrial midlands, asserts that: “the people who live here love the grime and the stench and the living conditions. They’ve never known anything else and it’s a part of them. That’s why they’ll fight this war to the end rather than surrender an inch of it.”⁷³

A subordinate group *within* the middle class, one of the abiding concerns of the dissenting middle class during the 1950s was its exclusion from power and position, illustrated by Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954) which Sinfield says featured both “subversive irreverence and a fantasy of social advance.”⁷⁴ Upwardly mobile intellectuals were deeply anxious about their position with respect to establishment culture, but this was given a particular inflexion in their hands, writes Sinfield: “The preoccupation with upward mobility through education was a story that society, or parts of it, wanted to tell itself, not a record of experience.”⁷⁵ The significance of Sinfield’s assertion is the suggestion that the experience of upward mobility became a powerful narrative of social change, but that for most of society it was not a relevant experience. Education did not guarantee a journey of upward mobility for most social groups.

Sinfield argues that in the course of the 1950s middle class dissent became identified with something more obviously left-wing in character, the New Left, which he defines as a “distinct phase of left-wing activity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, not just in *New Left Review* and among prominent intellectuals, but in a whole constituency, mainly young people.”⁷⁶ The main social basis of the New Left was a ‘left-liberal class fraction’, a subculture within the middle class but subordinate to its dominant fraction. Although this was their class position, according to Sinfield, these upwardly mobile intellectuals were overwhelmingly concerned with a working-class culture they had either left behind, or never inhabited in the first place, and which they persistently misrepresented. Sinfield

⁷³ Sinfield 1989 p12

⁷⁴ Sinfield 1989 p232

⁷⁵ Sinfield 1989 p234

⁷⁶ Sinfield 1989 p238

argues that: “a youthful left-liberal intelligentsia cohered around CND, Royal Court drama, some literature, folk music and jazz.”⁷⁷

Sinfield interprets the New Left as hostile to contemporary forms of popular culture, a hostility found in the writing of Richard Hoggart in the late 1950s, for example, but also in the more nuanced work of Raymond Williams. Sinfield cites the latter’s dismissal of “the horror film, the rape novel, the Sunday strip-paper and the latest Tin-Pan drool,” from *Communications*.⁷⁸ Such attacks could be related to the tendency, inherent in middle class dissent, to wholeheartedly support the provisions of the post-war settlement (in education and arts provision) whilst lamenting the relative failure of such provision to have an impact on the popular taste as exemplified by consumerism and the new affluence.⁷⁹

Sinfield periodises the New Left as a phenomenon of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which provides the category with coherence whilst setting it against later sixties developments. The apparently reckless commerciality of the later sixties “in magazines, clothes, the music business, love-ins, psychedelic light-shows and drugs” were for “left-culturalists” a disconcerting “combination of commerce and rebelliousness. They had accepted the notion of art as opposed, by definition, to commerce.”⁸⁰ Whilst this may have been true for some sections of the New Left (and more so within the Labour establishment in the case of individuals such as Lord Goodman), the New Left might be regarded as a developing and more contradictory phenomenon, if its life were extended to the end of the 1960s.⁸¹ Sinfield’s association of the New Left with the historically more enduring phenomenon of middle class dissent is valuable but tends to collapse when pushed too far. Ultimately, however, Sinfield’s book does not deal with the sixties in any detail and the relationship of the New Left to its increasing constituency of educated young people is barely discussed, although briefly alluded to. In his final chapter Sinfield reiterates his point that

⁷⁷ Sinfield 1989 p260

⁷⁸ Williams 1962 p102

⁷⁹ Sinfield 1989 pp243-4

⁸⁰ Sinfield 1989 pp284-285

⁸¹ As does Young 1977

the concept of 'good' culture that had been current after 1945, and which the New Left accepted, "took much from the residual leisure elite" and was a concept which had earlier been adopted by "Movement and Angry writers" searching for more down to earth modes of expression:

"They adopted jazz as a protest but also as an art. The New Left actually revalidated 'good' culture and 'responsible' institutions. All this came into question as the rebellion of middle-class and higher-educated young people impatient with the reticence of their parents coincided, briefly and almost uniquely, with the rebellion of lower-class young people, built upon the rock 'n' roll and skiffle subcultures."⁸²

The approach of this thesis is to consider the New Left in terms of the dislocating experience of post-war change, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which a broadly defined cultural politics of the New Left was bound-up with the question of mobility and space. Each chapter aims to explore a different aspect of the relationship between the New Left and cultural modernisation, beginning with Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and ending with a discussion of some of the radical architectural schemes that were proposed towards the end of the 1960s.

Chapter One is a brief introduction to the relationship between the early New Left (understood in its narrower sense) and cultural modernisation. The evidence suggests that the early New Left was interested in modernisation as a strategy and had some similarities, therefore, with the Revisionist wing of the Labour Party. This was the case with at least one faction within the organised New Left, that which was associated with the *Universities and Left Review*. Whereas some early advocates of New Left politics had their origins in the conventional left, the Communist Party in particular, and were concerned to come to terms with the debilitating legacy of Stalinism, others were far more rooted in the realities of post-war Britain. Of course this does not mean that New Left modernisers were uncritical of the culture of affluence and

⁸² Sinfield 1989 p284

consumerism; in some respects they embraced elements of the new culture but they were also deeply concerned with some of the negative consequences of new consumption patterns.

Chapter Two is primarily a comparison between the representation of class in *The Uses of Literacy* on the one hand and the films of the British New Wave on the other. These two examples have been chosen because they are part of a broadly defined New Left culture. Hoggart's book was widely read and is often considered to represent one aspect of the New Left; The New Wave's principal audience has frequently been defined in terms of the New Left intelligentsia. The key point of comparison is with respect to the experience and cultural politics of marginality. It has been conventional to regard Hoggart's principal concern as being the impact of mass culture on traditional working class culture. This is not an unreasonable way of reading Hoggart but he is also deeply anxious about another aspect of post-war social change: the emergence of a layer of individuals on the upper margins of the working class and on the lower margins of the lower middle class. The fascinating aspect of Hoggart's description of this social group is its similarity to what would subsequently become known as the counterculture; but in the late 1950s other concepts were employed to describe the (unhappy) experience of upward mobility. One available term was that of the scholarship boy, and Hoggart employs this, but the group he describes are the recipients of a less prestigious education than the term might imply. Hoggart's upwardly mobile individuals have not attended a university, they are insecure in their cultural tastes and ideas and they tend towards pretentious opinions, notably with respect to politics. They are liable, Hoggart suggests, to have opinions on such matters as nuclear weapons and the position of women, as well as having an interest in art and literature (areas in which they are clearly out of their depth.)

One reason for comparing Hoggart to the New Wave is because of a tendency to regard these as sharing a common attitude towards class and culture in the post-war period, and it is the case that both respond negatively to new forms of mass-produced culture. Furthermore, both Hoggart and the New Wave have constructed similar geographies of class: the working class community in both is

located in the North of England and is visualised in terms of an enclosed, closely bound domestic landscape. This chapter suggests that geography and space are absolutely central to the culture of the sixties New Left. In the case of these two examples, the tendency was to emphasise the static and immobile character of traditional working class culture, but already in the New Wave forms of cultural mobility were being considered, and not necessarily negatively. The significant difference between Hoggart and the New Wave was in the way they treated marginality. For Hoggart, marginality was always seen as negative, but in the British New Wave film the main protagonist was a marginalised anti-hero, alienated from consumer culture but also from the conventional and traditional culture which contains him. The New Wave film was sympathetic to the forms of escape which this anti-hero contemplated and practised. Such forms of escape had a close affinity with the emphasis on rawness, vitality, and spontaneity found within avant-garde art and this aspect of the New Wave forms a link to the discussion of British Pop Theory in Chapter Three.

Whilst writers such as Hoggart and Williams are conventionally regarded as representative of the New Left, one has to expand the definition of the latter in order to include the audience for the New Wave. It is even more unusual to include the activities of Pop Art's theorists and practitioners within the New Left but there are good reasons for doing this. Chapter Three discusses what I term British Pop Theory which had its origins in the late 1940s and early 1950s and was a response to the compromises made by the modernist design and architecture establishment following the formation of the welfare state. Practitioners such as Alison and Peter Smithson developed an architecture they called New Brutalism, a style which rejected the cosy sentimentality of post-war housing in favour of a rawness and vitality which had its inspiration in the European avant-garde. This approach was not only applied to architecture. In the 1950s a group of theorists and practitioners known as the Independent Group met and discussed a whole range of possibilities within art and design facilitated by the mass-production of consumer goods. Whereas a conventional left-wing attitude would have tended towards high-culturalism, the Independent Group discussions were intent on the development of a different aesthetic. In

particular, notions of expendability were given a positive value, suggestive of the idea, heretical in orthodox design establishment circles, that the mass-produced artefact could satisfy the genuine needs and desires of the consumer in ways that the products of high modernism could not. But in what ways could such an approach be identified with the New Left? There were, firstly, similarities between the modernising ideas found within the *ULR* and the New Wave and Pop Theory, in the assumption that genuine, 'authentic' artefacts were vital and expressive in ways first theorised by the European avant-garde. British Pop theory, because it was grounded in theoretical ideas with a strong visual component, was very effective in developing such ideas in a more sophisticated way than the literature-based conventional New Left. The new consumer culture was visual in form and Pop theory was able to discuss it effectively. Although it was sometimes naïve about the capacity of the market to satisfy the wants of the consumer, Pop theory was not in general uncritical and only favoured consumer goods that appeared to have certain qualities which encouraged active forms of consumption.

British Pop Theory also employed its definition of the popular in order to criticise Hoggart's narrative of the decline of traditional working class culture, and, in a way comparable to writers of the New Left such as Raymond Williams, suggested that class and community were, and always had been, more complex and diverse than *The Uses of Literacy* seemed to suggest. Reyner Banham in particular argued that the popular culture so derided by Hoggart and unfavourably compared to the traditional culture of his childhood, actually had its roots in the 1930s.

A very interesting achievement of British Pop Theory was its reworking of the concept of the scholarship boy, in the light of more recent forms of social, cultural and physical mobility. Reyner Banham used the image of the Moulton bicycle to suggest a different form of social mobility to that found in *The Uses of Literacy*. In particular it suggested that new forms of physical mobility might be a means by which the recipients of upward-mobility could acquire a more satisfactory self-identity, one that was not nostalgic for a mythical working class

past and which, at the same time, could come to terms with the working class culture of the present.

In Chapter Four the geographical component of New Left interest in culture is explored further. The chapter begins with a discussion of suburbia, a residential form made possible by new modes of mechanised transport and which, by the 1960s, was pervasive. The extension of motor car ownership and the development of the road transport network promoted more decentralisation in the 1960s, breaking down the isolation of regions and communities. The suburb was almost universally despised by the liberal intelligentsia and the New Left and this further diffusion of its characteristically decentralised form (its mutation into megalopolis) was associated with further cultural anxiety and with a tendency towards nostalgia for the enclosed and static spaces of traditional working class culture. If, however, the New Left is understood in broad terms (not in terms of Hoggart's nostalgia for the traditional community but as a modernising force, bound-up with a more mobile and less proximate culture) it is evident that decentralised space and new forms of physical mobility had a broad popular appeal which exponents of modernisation addressed.

Contested landscapes were also figured within larger units of nation space as the cultural divide between North and South was challenged. The representation of the authentic, working class community through images of the urban North contrasted with the experience of spatial dislocation as found in Hoggart, was frequently challenged. Whilst some New Left thinking did idealise the experience of an immobile society others questioned its value. Raymond Williams questioned the value of proximate landscapes which kept their populations isolated and materially impoverished and theorised a mobile landscape which was both democratic and popular. Much earlier, J.B. Priestley had held an unorthodox attitude towards new forms of urban modernity. Priestley is read, in part, through the work of cultural geographer, J.B. Jackson, whose defence of the mobile landscape forms a bridge between Priestley's 1930s viewpoint and developments in Britain in the 1960s.

A series of publications which have been defined as the What's Wrong With Britain? literature⁸³ are discussed as one response to Britain's poor economic performance, which they attributed to the nation's institutional archaism.

The overall context for these publications was the modernisation project. The overarching theme that can be detected in this literature is a frustration at what was perceived to be archaism and stagnation within the culture and economy of Britain, the solution to which would be a thoroughgoing modernisation. The spatial and geographical aspects of such a modernisation project were extensively discussed in one book in the sequence entitled, *The Other England*, by Geoffrey Moorhouse. This book provides the final case study for this chapter and can be read as a critical response to the prevailing cultural geography in the sixties.

The argument of this chapter is that cultural responses to modernisation in Britain had a significant spatial dimension, both in terms of the immediate landscape which might be invested with the characteristics of mobility or proximity, and in terms of the broader character of national geography and space. Tendencies within the New Left did favour the idealised landscape of an enclosed community, but there is considerable evidence of enthusiasm for modernisation of space amongst some critics within the broadly defined New Left.

In Chapter Five it is argued that the moment of 1968 can be understood as a politics of space. The discussion begins by considering the role which the New Left ascribed to the expanded intelligentsia borne of post-war social change. The lower reaches of this group had been positioned by Hoggart on the margins of the closely-boundaried working class community. By the middle of the 1960s eight years of university expansion had produced a larger and more educated group than Hoggart could have imagined. Perry Anderson, however, whilst considering the intelligentsia as a vital component in revolutionary struggle, characterised the deficiencies of this group in terms similar to those of Hoggart. Anderson's mid sixties view of the intelligentsia are compared with the slightly

⁸³ Hewison 1986

later views of Marcuse. In contrast to Anderson, Marcuse's view was underpinned by his understanding of consumer capitalism and the particular role of a dissenting intelligentsia within its spaces, the latter invested by Marcuse with psychological characteristics.

The rapidity of events during 1968 led the New Left to reassess the position of student militants who were now given the role of the dissenting intelligentsia which Anderson had considered to be so vital. Drawing from a wide range of theoretical sources (Mao, Althusser, Marcuse, Lefebvre and Debord) New Left activists, writing in early 1969,⁸⁴ argued that universities could become liberated zones, comparable to Mao's establishment of red bases. It was an argument about those particular physical and institutional spaces which constituted the weakest link in the imperialist chain but also the psychological characteristics of such spaces. One manifestation of the red base in the late sixties was the 'anti-institution,' a form of alternative spatialisation which can be found in spontaneous appropriations of space such as student occupations of their universities, the activities of community squatting movements but also the imagining, planning and sometimes construction of architectural space.

Chapter Six explores the similarities between forms of space politics derived from the European avant-garde and schemes produced by British radical architects. Both, it is suggested, might be defined as a politics of indeterminacy. The space politics of the barricade (the avant-garde European model) conceived of certain space as having an emotional and poetic quality which would allow the subject to be freed from alienation and new forms of oppression. This was a form of space politics with its origins in Surrealism and in later avant-garde theory associated with Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre. The latter, particularly, had theorised the oppressive structures of everyday life as embodied in modern architectural form.

The theory of indeterminacy had part of its origins in ideas about avant-garde art, but was particularly developed in British radical architecture theory (and

⁸⁴ Cockburn and Blackburn 1969; *New Left Review* 53 1969

some, limited, practice). Indeterminate architecture was in part associated with attempts to reclaim or produce spaces within which spontaneity and vitality might flourish but it was also concerned with challenging the lack of utility of architecture that could not adapt to changes over time, and favoured forms that could incorporate flexibility and expandable elements, therefore.

The Fun Palace project⁸⁵ (an unrealised scheme for an arts centre in the East End of London which prefigured the Pompidou Centre in Paris) had its origins in both radical architecture and political theatre. The Fun Palace project can be considered as an example of indeterminate architecture but it will also be compared to the Anti-hospital (an example of one of the anti-institutions discussed in the previous chapter.) It is suggested that their similarities were in a common attitude towards the user who was considered to be an alienated subject who might be liberated from the oppressive conventions of everyday life.

There was, however, in British pop architecture theory a growing element which emphasised the utilitarian aspect of flexible and expendable structures, and this related to Britain's modernisation project. A significant emerging element in British theory is one which turned towards the suburb as a model of democratic participation to be contrasted with the inflexibilities of older urban forms. Reyner Banham discussed this in an article largely concerned with American developments but this approach is at its most developed in the Non-Plan essay, published in 1969.⁸⁶

Non-Plan proposed the abandonment of physical planning and envisaged spontaneous development and growth. Its participatory model was based on pop culture which the Non-Plan authors considered to be immediate and responsive to its user's desires. Pop culture represented a massive visual explosion but its impact on the British landscape had been insignificant, as a consequence of planning restrictions. Non-Plan continued to express itself on occasions using the language of vitality, but it was a scheme for architectural

⁸⁵ Lewis 1965; Author Unknown 1967; Lobsinger 2000

indeterminacy which had very little connection with the more critical politics of alienation as generally espoused by the New Left. Cybernetics and systems theory were the models favoured by Non-Plan to suggest the possibility of popular, participatory and democratic space. Their differences notwithstanding, both European and British models were forms of cultural politics which assumed continued, rising affluence. Despite their differences they were both, overwhelmingly, a politics of consumption.

⁸⁶ Banham *et al* 1969

Chapter One

Modernisation, the New Left and Britain in the Sixties

“There is no place for socialist ‘squares’ in the age of Humphrey Lyttelton, Aldermaston, and Manchester United”¹

Introduction

The aim of this brief, first chapter is to introduce a way of discussing the new Left in terms of the politics of cultural modernisation, in contrast to more conventional approaches to the movement. Whilst one interpretation of the New Left’s origins is to place it in the context of international political events, it can also be understood as engaged in new forms of politics which emerged as a consequence of post-war social and cultural transformation. Social change, affluence and social and cultural mobility were the concerns of the New Left, but its approach will be contrasted to that of Richard Hoggart, a figure sometimes identified with the New Left, who was also concerned with the consequences of affluence. In sharp contrast to the approach of Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*,² the New Left was to embrace youth culture, to a certain extent, although there was no wholesale or uncritical acceptance of the benefits of new modes of consumption. Whilst Hoggart argued that the qualities and values of cultural life were being eroded by affluence, the New Left considered that many of these changes in working class life were of benefit. Crucial elements within New Left thinking and practice was its attitude towards alternative forms of community (exemplified by the CND Aldermaston marches) and its perception of a radical potential for youth culture. The New Left’s politics of modernisation provides an interesting contrast to the more familiar Wilsonian variant of the mid – sixties with its emphasis on a scientific and technological revolution, but also to Labour revisionism’s interest in the reformation of everyday culture.

¹ Attributed by Samuel to Paul Rose, secretary of the Manchester Left Club, in Samuel 1989 p44

The New Left in Context

A conventional view of the New Left is to consider its formation in Britain in the context of four historical circumstances: the response of British Marxist intellectuals to the disclosures at the CPSU 20th Congress (as well as to the British CP's attempts to suppress discussion of these); the Soviet invasion of Hungary; the crisis of social democracy in the context of the affluence debate; and broad, domestic concerns about national identity that emerged in the wake of the Suez crisis. A part of the New Left was politically informed by the historical concerns of the old left; another's politics were far more structured by contemporary issues, differences which were incorporated into two publications. The *New Reasoner* was a journal produced by dissenting members of the CPGB's Historian's Group and its political perspective was shaped by the experience of the thirties Popular Front and the stultifying influence of Stalinism upon the political and theoretical development of the left; the *Universities and Left Review* was largely post-war in its interests and was concerned to assess "the shifting basis of economic and social life in the 1950s."³ It is the latter group which is the principal concern of this thesis, those associated with the New left whose concerns were most influenced by the recent social and economic change and with the politics of affluence. Whilst those gathered around the *Universities and Left Review* were most interested in this type of politics it is also important to acknowledge that the New Left can also be understood in a broader sense, as a social group which had emerged in the context of recent changes but which was composed of large numbers of individuals with no necessary connection to particular journals or to formal politics.

One context for this group's interest in the politics of affluence was a series of sociological studies published at the end of the 1950s which appeared to suggest that there had occurred a fundamental change in class relations. The perception that there had been a wholesale transformation of the class structure was widespread and was expressed in accounts such as *Must Labour Lose?*⁴

² Hoggart 1957

³ Kenny 1995 p56

⁴ Abrams and Rose 1960

and Zweig's *The Worker in an Affluent Society*.⁵ In their study of the sociology of the affluent worker, published in the late sixties, Goldthorpe and Lockwood identified changes in the urban ecology and the decline of traditional working class communities as one of the premises that underlay the theory,⁶ although their conclusion was not to support the notion that the working class was becoming middle class. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, these earlier sociological studies had both fed and expressed the belief, existent within the revisionist wing of the Labour Party, that the class basis of Labour's support had been fatally eroded and that a fundamental strategic re-appraisal of socialism's ambitions and methods was necessary.⁷

Hoggart and the New Left

Of great concern to the left was the suggestion in the aforementioned studies that 'community' was in decline. Kenny argues that community was a concept which "lay at the heart of older interpretations of socialism," and that it was associated with a particular place, the urban working class community, albeit in a frequently idealised form.⁸ The belief that the working class community was being eroded was the context for the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*⁹ in 1957, a book credited with altering the terrain upon which class might be understood. Hoggart is frequently considered to be an important figure within the early New Left but his approach to the social and cultural changes signified by the concept of affluence was far less sophisticated than the cultural politics associated with the *ULR*. The thrust of Hoggart's book was to shift the emphasis from the purported economic benefits of this modified system, to the qualities and values of a cultural life now being eroded.¹⁰ Hoggart, however, did not deny that changes associated with the theory of affluence were occurring, rather, as Critcher has stated, his account was "an attempt to invert the optimism of the 'affluence' position from within; the validity of the thesis is not questioned, only the assumption that its outcomes could be

⁵ Zweig 1961

⁶ See Critcher 1979 p15; pp27-34

⁷ Crosland 1964

⁸ Kenny 1995 p93

⁹ Hoggart 1957

¹⁰ Critcher 1979 p17

good.”¹¹ Having effectively conceded that the sociological generalisations of the affluence and embourgeoisement theorists were fact, Hoggart went on to construct a space that was a survival of traditional working class culture, albeit one under threat and in the process of being destroyed. Hoggart achieved this in part through autobiography: places where working class culture survived were defined through reference to memories of his own childhood in Hunslett. But Hoggart also created this account of working class community through two underlying (and unacknowledged) theoretical models: a theory of mass culture which held that commercialisation produced an homogenised and trivial culture of mind numbing banality; and the English literary criticism of F.R. Leavis, which had contrasted recent culture with a largely mythical folk culture of the common people, located within an historically undefined golden age. The originality of Hoggart’s project was in the way he appropriated Leavisite ideas, “by insisting... that the folk culture was in fact urban, working class and contemporary,”¹² not rural, peasant and located in the past, as Leavis would have it.

The problem of interpreting affluence was the context for another essay by Stuart Hall, published in 1960. ‘The Supply of Demand’, published in the collection *Out of Apathy*, gives some insight into Samuel’s discussion. Hall noted that some who favoured modernisation considered these new patterns of consumption to be entirely beneficial. An article in *The Economist* in 1959 had suggested that:

“The modern Conservative should be one who looks at the television aerials sprouting above the working class homes of England, who looks down on the housewives’ tight slacks on the back of the motor-bicycle and family sidecars on the summer road to Brighton, and who sees a great poetry in them. For this is what the deproletarianisation of British society means.”¹³

The Economist had favourably contrasted this positive attitude towards affluence with that of the “old-fashioned Conservative” who might see the

¹¹ Critcher 1979 p18

¹² Critcher 1979 p18

¹³ ‘The Unproletarian Society’ from *The Economist*, May 16th 1959, cited by Hall 1960 p56

working class as “getting above their station.”¹⁴ Hall’s response had been to dismiss the popular myths upon which such notions of affluence were based. The new prosperity was geographically patchy: the new consumer culture might be booming in Dagenham but in Lancashire there was stagnation. The car industry was flourishing but the roads were inadequate, the harbours full and unmodernised and the railway system obsolete. Whilst the new forms of prosperity were mesmerising, the overall picture was of “unplanned chaos.”¹⁵

Whilst Hall dismissed the notion of a “teenage revolution” as demonstrably a myth, on the grounds that the country had a woefully inadequate supply of trained youth leaders,¹⁶ he went on to defend the teenage consumer against embourgeoisement theory. Hall did not suggest that the pop music and the fashion with which teenagers were engaged was in any sense of value, but denied that these consumption patterns were indicative of the decline in class awareness, on the basis that their social consciousness was determined by work and their status as wage-earners rather than salary-drawers.¹⁷

Consumerism was analysed as an ideological condition, the effect of which was to make the provision of public services appear undemocratic:

“Eventually the consumer *does* begin to feel ‘free’ to decide about detergents in a way in which he is not ‘free’ to decide the education of his children. Education, health, welfare, housing and so on, therefore, assume the status of ‘unnecessary and wasteful spending’”¹⁸

Hall’s analysis of the origins of such a condition located the change in the mid 1950s when prosperity began to be redefined in terms of things that could be bought, possessed and experienced as a private individual, rather than in the provision of services directed towards the public good. Things experienced in this way then came to acquire a social importance disproportionate to their use

¹⁴ ‘The Unproletarian Society’ from *The Economist*, May 16th 1959, cited by Hall 1960 p56

¹⁵ Hall 1960 pp65-66

¹⁶ Hall 1960 p59

¹⁷ Hall 1960 p91-92

¹⁸ Hall 1960 p72

value: the symbolic value of the second-hand car or the washing machine, for example, obliterated the needs of individuals (or even the same individuals) occupying other roles, such as that of the pedestrian or car crash victim.¹⁹ The New Left by no means embraced consumerism uncritically, therefore, and in fact was searching for an adequate strategy to deal with this post-war phenomenon.

In contrast to Hoggart, Hall wished to see the values of working class community “transposed into the new physical environments.” Hall rejected outright the embourgeoisement theory and the implication that if the culture of the new working class took a different physical form that it meant therefore that this group had now become or was becoming middle class. Hall maintained that many of the “changes in working class life and attitudes are *gains*, not losses, in the main,”²⁰ partly because the warm, friendly and familiar neighbourhood was “often, a cluttered, cramped, inconvenient slum,”²¹ partly because in the case of youth in particular it was “less conformist... less servile to authority.”²²

Modernisation and the New Left

The modernising section of the New Left had a far more complex attitude towards cultural change than that found in Hoggart, particularly with respect to youth culture and the changing nature of the traditional working class community. “Members of the New Left... were modernisers,” argued Samuel, who, writing about his own experiences with the *Universities and Left Review*, maintained that in the late 1950s there was an affinity between protest politics and the politics of generational revolt. Modernisation in Samuel’s account addressed older questions associated with the pre-war modern movement but was also bound-up with the post-war politics of youth. The interest of the New Left in modernisation took a number of forms, ranging from an enthusiasm for sans-serif typography, illustrated in the *ULR*’s use of bold, clear lines, to a preoccupation with youth culture and dressing sharply; *ULR* –ers were “hip”,

¹⁹ Hall 1960 pp73-75

²⁰ Hall 1960 p95

²¹ Hall 1960 p93

Samuel argued.²³ The *ULR* had an interest in issues associated with new forms of consumerism, an enthusiasm for science and technology, a commitment to modernist design and to modern urban architecture, and to early sixties symbols of modernisation such as the motorway. And in art the New Left favoured directness and honesty: *ULR*'s successor, the *New Left Review* had praised the 'frankness in the portrayal of physical love' in the New Wave film, *Room at the Top*. Taking their cue from a general attitude towards the political establishment which took hold in the post-Suez period, Britain was characterised as archaic, Conservatism being associated with feudalism, colonialism and 'Old Corruption.'

What is interesting about Samuel's memoir is the range of interests and concerns he considers to be modernising in character. Samuel includes *Bauhaus* typography, which one would associate with interwar European modernism; motorways, which he describes as "English *Autobahnen*,"²⁴ science and technology; youth culture; and an interest in the politics of consumerism. In particular one should note Samuel's reference to the politics and style of youth culture and generational revolt, and to new forms of consumerism. In fact this interest in youth culture and consumerism was one of the distinguishing features of one section of the New Left, although it would be incorrect to regard such an interest as indicative of an uncritical acceptance of such developments. According to Samuel "the new forms of consumerism... were remaking capitalism and class." The New Left used the concept of alienation in order "to address the phenomenon of consumerism, to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' needs, spontaneous desires and manipulated ones."²⁵ If the New Left had an enthusiasm for the style of youth culture there was also a concern about consumption patterns in general.

Modernisation had been a key concept in the programme of the 1964 Labour government. The Labour Party had been in opposition since losing the election of 1951 and for most of the subsequent period had failed to articulate a strategy

²² Hall 1960 p92

²³ Samuel 1989 p44

²⁴ Samuel 1989 p42

that could challenge the Conservatives. Labour had initially believed that the Conservatives would inevitably dismantle the welfare state and that there would be a return to mass unemployment, a view that transpired to be groundless, and it was unable to persuade voters of the evils of the new prosperity. Despite the debacle of Suez, Labour lost the 1959 election. The policy turning point was a document prepared by the Labour Party's NEC, entitled *Labour and the Scientific Revolution* and published in 1963. The essence of the policy was to attack the Conservatives for presiding over a slow pace of scientific and technological change and to link this to the amateurism and institutional archaism of British society. Conservatives were attacked for their social background, notably characterised as a 'grouse-moor' leadership under Sir Alec Douglas-Home.²⁶

But modernisation was a more expansive concept than was expressed in Harold Wilson's rhetorical gestures against the establishment. The need to modernise the transport network, the management of British industry, or housing was one use of the term, but it could equally have been applied to the laws governing censorship, the power of the House of Lords, or the content and style of BBC radio. Modernisation referred to public developments such as the construction of the GPO tower, but it also applied to personal matters such as hairstyle, accent and matters of cultural taste. In a lot of respects modernisation cut across political party divisions. There was a modernising wing within the Conservative party, enamoured with the idea of an efficient, managerial solution to problems associated with transformed post-war capitalism. Revisionism within the Labour Party wanted to accomplish a policy shift from the politics of class conflict to the politics of managing growth and consumption.

Discussing the late fifties New Left, Michael Rustin referred to the "love-hate relationship" between the *Universities and Left Review* and modernisers from Labour's revisionist wing. Both shared the conviction that a transformation of society was not possible on the basis of "traditional formulae," and some Labour revisionists believed an alliance to be possible with certain modernisers from

²⁵ Samuel 1989 p51

ULR, if the latter could be separated from their “Marxist attachments.” But this was not to be, argued Rustin, and in the course of the early sixties the interest of revisionists such as Crosland in the ideas of the New Left faded.²⁷

New Left and Alternative Culture

Whilst Crosland is frequently read as intent on removing Labour’s nominal commitment to socialism, his ideas about modernisation corresponded to broader issues and, in Alf Louvre’s estimation, prefigured some of the concerns of the late sixties counterculture. In his conclusion to *The Future of Socialism*, Crosland discussed those questions which would inevitable arise in a society which had resolved “the old collective grievances and injustices”. What society would now need, argued Crosland, were “not only higher exports and old-age pensions, but more open-air cafes, brighter and gayer streets at night, [and] later closing-hours for public houses.”²⁸ Despite the obvious deficiencies in Crosland’s prognosis, Louvre argued that his book introduced ideas about the politics of culture and of the subject which were subsequently taken up in the later sixties.²⁹

Elements of contemporary, popular style were being invested with a political significance which the old left would not have recognised. In his discussion of the ‘new radicalism’ that became a feature of cultural politics in Britain, France and America after 1956, Alf Louvre suggests that:

“new kinds of radical synthesis were offered, emphasising, amongst other things, the political significance of matters previously thought peripheral to the cause. The nuances of everyday style, lifestyle, language and taste were no longer to be seen merely as private or individual quirks, but as symptomatic, as telling indices of more general values and allegiances.”³⁰

²⁶ Bogdanor 1970 p105. See also Siedentop 1970

²⁷ Rustin 1989 119-120

²⁸ Crosland 1964 p355

²⁹ Louvre 1992 p48

³⁰ Louvre 1992 p45

This assertion is supported by a recent discussion of New Left responses to youth culture, by Nick Bentley.³¹ In an article written for the *ULR* on Colin MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners* (1959), Stuart Hall had attempted to find an explanation for the consumption patterns of young people. Hall identified aspects of working class education which resulted in "young people compensat[ing] for their frustrations by an escape into the womb-world of mass entertainments."³² Hall regarded the relationship between teenagers and the products they consumed as one of exploitation:

In response to the cultural exploitation... many teenagers erect cultural barriers themselves, so that their leisure world absorbs and consumes all the emotional vitality and the fantasy and imaginative projections of adolescence, and becomes a wholly self-enclosed universe."³³

However, whilst the first part of Hall's article emphasises the ways in which new forms of commercialised culture had debilitating consequences, he then moved on to explore the more radical aspects of youth culture, which were represented in MacInnes's novel. The new youth subculture was

"a fast-talking, smooth-running, hustling generation with an ad-lib gift of the gab, quick sensitivities and responses ... They are city birds ... remarkably self-possessed ... they despise the masses ... they seem culturally exploited rather than socially deprived."³⁴

Bentley argues that Hall's idea of youth culture discussed in this article does not fit easily with "hoggart's homogenised construction of working class youth."³⁵ The subculture Hall described was more prevalent amongst middle class youth, "the very smart young men and women of the metropolitan jazz clubs,"³⁶ a different social group to Hoggart's Teds who frequented other spaces.

³¹ Bentley 2005

³² Hall 1959 p21, cited in Bentley 2005 p71

³³ Hall 1959 p20, cited in Bentley 2005 pp71-72

³⁴ Hall 1959 p25, cited in Bentley 2005 p72

³⁵ Bentley 2005 p72

It is suggested by Bentley that this shift in the object of study, from working class to more middle class youth, was in part the foundation for the final section of Hall's discussion, which was to argue that youth subcultures had a radical potential "as a cultural rather than a *political* or class-based phenomenon, associating youth with a cultural avant-garde rather than a socialist politics based on economics in the last instance."³⁷

In the mid-sixties Stuart Hall (with Paddy Whannel) would continue to address some of these themes in *The Popular Arts*,³⁸ a book which incorporated a (left) Leavisite emphasis on 'discrimination,' whilst adopting a sympathetic attitude towards youth styles and forms. According to Bentley, Hall's 1959 article had been keen to emphasise the 'authenticity' of MacInnes's novel, suggesting that it had a 'social documentary' form, despite being fiction, and the former concept is also employed by Hall and Whannel in *The Popular Arts*. Youth is seen as engaged in an "authentic response ... [to] a society in transition,"³⁹ as well as exhibiting a creative and pioneering radicalism:

"Sometimes this response can be seen in direct terms – kinds of radical political energy with certain clear-cut symbolic targets (the threat of nuclear weapons, political apathy ... 'the Establishment'). Sometimes, the response takes the form of a radical shift in social habits – for example, the slow but certain revolution in sexual morality among young people."⁴⁰

The response of Stuart Hall to youth culture, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was one which was open to its radical potential. Later interpretations have suggested that the New Left was closely associated with radical alternative culture. The British New Left might itself be understood as a "subculture," to use Sinfield's term, or even a "mood."⁴¹ Nigel Young argues that between 1956 and 1965 a distinctively 'new' left evolved, distinguishable from old left wing political movements, in both their revolutionary and reformist manifestations.

³⁶ Hall 1959 p23, cited in Bentley 2005 p72

³⁷ Bentley 2005 p72

³⁸ Hall and Whannel 1964

³⁹ Hall 1964 p273, cited in Bentley 2005 p73

⁴⁰ Hall 1964 p273, cited in Bentley 2005 p73

With respect to Britain, Young uses the example of CND.⁴² Most significant, argues Young, was the emphasis on action as an existential necessity. Action was regarded by R.D. Laing – radical psychiatrist and peace activist – as a means to cut through people’s “entanglement in the thickets of false-consciousness and pseudo events,” and thus could expose larger structures of domination.⁴³ From the very earliest Aldermaston marches there was also the notion that the movement was an “alternative in embryo.”⁴⁴ Young argues that events such as the Aldermaston marches provided participants with a sense of an emerging new community:

“For the young people who joined these movements, this participation was everything; the feeling of solidarity did not end when each particular project came to an end; it moved into other fields and other places. It represented a new synthesis, the beginnings of a visible social alternative – an immanent counterculture that merged personal expressiveness with political activism.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

This brief survey has suggested that a fruitful approach to the New Left is to place it in the context of the politics of modernisation rather than the political concerns of the old left. In comparison to Hoggart, the New Left tended to embrace aspects of recent social and cultural change, while remaining critical of theories of affluence and embourgeoisement. The view of youth culture favoured by Hall was one which emphasised its radical potential, but this would suggest a rather different social group to that described and despaired of by Hoggart. The suggestion is that the New Left was interested in popular culture of a certain type, that it was selective and by no means uncritical. That the New Left had a qualified and critical approach to popular culture (by no means dismissive but certainly not populist) is a significant point and it will be an important theme throughout the thesis. The following chapter will consider the

⁴¹ Young 1977 defines CND as “more a mood than a movement”

⁴² Also see Taylor 1970 pp221-253

⁴³ R.D. Laing, cited by Young 1977 p25

⁴⁴ Young 1977 p24

⁴⁵ Young 1977 p28

differences between Hoggart and the New Wave in greater detail, particularly with respect to their distinctive attitudes towards popular culture.

Chapter Two

Representations of Class and Cultural Mobility in Hoggart and the British New Wave

“A working class hero is something to be”¹

“a film with a working class hero, and also a working class heroine, and one which continues the process of making the working class *visible*”²

“it was suddenly vital, especially on the left, to write about the working class”³

Introduction

During the early 1960s in Britain, the New Left in particular was preoccupied with working class culture. A key purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the reasons for this interest, but also to examine the way in which it was expressed in terms of space. Significant changes to the social structure during the post-war period had led to a high degree of social mobility, one of the consequences of which was that the character of the middle class changed with the expansion of a range of salaried jobs and professions. There also occurred an extensive adjustment to the culture of class and the barriers which had previously given different social classes their distinctiveness began to be eroded. This latter process was in particular perceived to be a problem by Richard Hoggart. Both Hoggart in the late 1950s and the British New Wave in film in the late 1950s and early 1960s were concerned with class mobility and its cultural consequences, but represented the process differently; whilst Hoggart expressed a disquiet with the emergence of a disaffected cultural minority on the upper margins of the working class, the New Wave tended to express the viewpoint and dilemmas of this group. By focusing on attitudes

¹ Lennon 1970

² Marwick 1998 p140, discussing *This Sporting Life*

³ Sinfield 1989 p253

toward upwardly mobile marginality in these two examples the intention is, firstly, to read Hoggart 'against the grain,' not to deny that he was particularly concerned with the problem, as he saw it, of mass culture, but to suggest that his disquiet at the emergence of a disaffected group on the upper margins of the working class implied an anxiety with other aspects of social change; secondly, in the case of the New Wave, marginality was represented in a way which alluded to the culture of the New Left and suggested ways in which the latter had links to an emerging counterculture. Although Hoggart defines members of this group using the term 'scholarship boy' it will be suggested that the characteristics of those he describes do not apply to the university educated but to a much broader group whose grammar school education allowed them a degree of cultural mobility. New Wave film is examined through a range of literature but in particular John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism* which has considered the relationship of these films to its (now) middle class audience. A key theme in this chapter is the relationship between the representation of working class culture (as can be found in the New Wave) and the cultural dispositions of the aforementioned new middle class, a theme which is explored through work by Stuart Hall,⁴ Bernice Martin⁵ and Alan Sinfield.⁶ Whilst the sympathies of the New Wave were with disaffected members within the working class community, in contrast to the position of Hoggart, its views of mass culture was as dismissive as those of the latter, a position which some have identified as characteristic of the progressive middle class and as having its origins within the longer history of Romantic, middle class dissidence. A final example briefly considers a more theoretical aspect of the New Left, in the form of Perry Anderson's 'Origins of the Present Crisis', but notes the extent to which this essay shared some similar assumptions about class and culture as those found in Hoggart. Anderson's thesis occurred in more popular versions during the 1960s and the discussion ends by referring to a film released in 1970, *The Breaking of Bumbo*, which represents the problem of class and culture in some of the ways evident at the beginning of the 1960s.

⁴ Hall 1980

⁵ Martin 1983

⁶ Sinfield 1989

It is hoped to be demonstrated in the course of this chapter that that which distinguishes the New Left's culture (in the form of the New Wave and its audience) from Hoggart was the former's engagement with modernisation, even whilst certain readings of New Wave cinema detect a degree of nostalgia for the enclosed spaces of traditional working class culture. The New Left in the early 1960s does appear to be burdened with a tendency to counterpose authenticity to mass culture, and these tendencies remain evident throughout its existence. Nevertheless, the New Left's positive engagement with other elements of the politics of modernisation suggest that a broader interpretation of its character is also possible. One way to consider this more expansive perspective on the New Left might be through ideas of space. The chapter ends with a reference to one of the principal subjects of Chapter Three, the architecture and design historian Reyner Banham, who viewed himself as a 'scholarship boy' but recognised nothing of himself or his background in Hoggart's writing. Banham, because of his background in design and the visual arts was particularly attuned to the spatial and his work suggests the possibility of a somewhat different approach to the history of the New Left and modernisation in Britain in the 1960s.

Theoretical Approaches to Modernisation and Class in Sixties Britain

In the introduction to this thesis there was a survey of the literature addressing the issue of cultural modernisation in post-war Britain. Although writing from different perspectives, Stuart Hall, Bernice Martin and Alan Sinfield all noted the role of the progressive middle class in this modernisation process. Significant changes to the social structure in the post-war period involved shifts between the classes and this process was made complicated by a more extensive adjustment in class cultures. As the boundaries that had previously given different social classes their distinctiveness began to dissolve there was a new found interest in what was perceived to be traditional working class culture.

Sinfield argues that whilst the progressive middle class had become increasingly prominent in post-war Britain, it tended towards the appropriation of selective aspects of working class culture. In the early 1960s there was a

widespread preoccupation with working class culture, represented in such diverse forms as novels, sociology, political analysis and films, argued Sinfield, who went further to suggest that such an interest was a defining characteristic of the New Left and that “for all their concern with working class culture – indeed partly *through* that concern – left-liberal intellectuals were actually engaged in making their own subculture.”⁷

Bernice Martin argues that the growth of the new middle class in post-war Britain was intimately connected to the rise of the expressive professions and to an increasing emphasis on cultural and expressive matters as opposed to the utilitarian and functional. Martin suggests that these structural changes provides an explanation for the progressive middle class’s exorbitant interest in certain aspects of working class culture and their preoccupation with what were imagined to be that culture’s more vitalistic and unsophisticated elements. The progressive middle class selectively appropriated aspects of working class culture because it wished to discover more authentic and vital modes of cultural expression. But in its embrace of unrestrained expressivity as a positive value, and in its disregard for the conventions of bourgeois respectability, the progressive middle class fundamentally misunderstood working class culture, Martin argues.⁸

Many of the disruptions to Britain’s culture in the sixties were actually conflicts over space, Martin implies, sometimes real space as the traditional community lost its coherence and identity, but frequently in other terms as the signposts which gave life its clarity and meaning were disrupted. Martin’s book is essentially a critique of what she terms the Expressive Revolution,⁹ something that had its most visible manifestation in the extremes of the counterculture, but which she considered to be a way of characterising much broader and pervasive social changes saturating vast swathes of everyday life. The sixties was also the moment when the Expressive Revolution, essentially a romantic project with origins in the late 18th century, became for a period associated with

⁷ Sinfield 1989 p260

⁸ Martin 1983 pp54-55; p169; pp185-234

⁹ Martin 1983 pp13-26

socialist and Marxist ideologies and movements, in the form of the New Left. Martin challenges the self-evident nature of this confluence, however, suggesting that Romanticism had no necessary political character whatsoever, arguing that any correspondence between the counterculture and the Left was a temporary one.¹⁰ The radicalism which was apparent in politics was paralleled and underpinned by cultural attitudes. Martin argues, using Bernstein to support this,¹¹ that in the stance towards education this change was palpable: the new middle class favouring a more open approach to learning in which the expressive development of the child was paramount; the 'traditional' middle class far more concerned with education as the acquisition of discreet bodies of knowledge for functional and practical purposes.

For Martin, the significance of Bernstein's insights¹² is that they establish the degree to which respectable working class culture was dependent on the maintenance of boundaries and that the challenge from the progressive middle class was both an assault on valuable symbols but also detrimental to its interests. In the tendency towards an informalisation of education "the main casualties... are the children of the working class" whilst middle class children were adept at understanding the "*implicit* rules and *hidden* meanings" within the progressive pedagogy."¹³

Hall also uses the work of Basil Bernstein, whose studies on the sociology of education were significant in the sixties and seventies, in support of his argument. Bernstein's argument is that there were different ways in which educational knowledge was classified and framed, yielding different educational pedagogies: some pedagogies were unambiguously classified with their contents separated from one another by strong boundaries; other pedagogies were weakly classified with considerable ambiguity between subjects and leakage across fragile boundaries. Framing referred to the context for the transmission of knowledge, in terms of the relationship of power and control between teacher and taught. Strongly framed knowledge implied little dialogue

¹⁰ Martin 1983 p18

¹¹ Martin 1983 pp45-48; pp54-55

¹² Martin 1983 pp45-48; pp54-55

or negotiation between the former and the latter; weak framing was dialogical, open to negotiation, more 'permissive.'¹⁴

Bernstein went on to associate these different pedagogies with the practices and dispositions of different sections of the middle class:

"If the ideologies of the old middle classes were institutionalised in the public schools and through them into grammar schools, so the ideology of the new middle classes were first institutionalised in private pre-schools and then private/public secondary schools, and finally into the state system at the level of the infant school."¹⁵

Hall argues that Bernstein's insight regarding the ideological rift within the middle class could be extended from the field of education to other arenas. Hall's essay was concerned with changing modes for the regulation of moral and sexual conduct in sixties Britain and he had discerned a conspicuous division between the traditional and progressive middle class in their attitude towards this matter. In the late fifties and sixties a process had begun whereby legislation governing sexual and social conduct and freedom of expression was enacted which aimed to alter the modes of regulation and control of these spheres: retaining and strengthening the compulsory element in some respects; in others introducing an element of freedom and choice. This "double taxonomy,"¹⁶ as Hall describes it, applied across the whole range of practices from the laws governing homosexuality to those concerned with obscene publications and theatre censorship. Practices which could be deemed to be an offence to public morality were strictly regulated; those which were judged to be 'private,' occurring between consenting adults, were henceforth considered to be outside of the immediate control of the law. As the notion of the double taxonomy implies, this state of affairs did not indicate an absence of regulation but that this was achieved "by a different modality of control: that of freely

¹³ Martin 1983 pp211-212

¹⁴ Hall 1980 p40-41; Bernstein 1975; for an extensive discussion of the concept of the 'frame' as the organisation of experience see Goffman 1974

¹⁵ Bernstein 1975 pp124-5 quoted in Hall 1980 p41

¹⁶ Hall 1980 p15

contracting private individuals,"¹⁷ the dismantling of "the whole architecture of moral blame"¹⁸ and the legislation of 'consent' as the guiding principle, in selective fields.

By the end of the 1960s there was to be a reaction against the decade's moral reformism and one form which this reaction was to take, Hall argues, was as a division between the traditional and progressive sections of the middle class. With respect to this process Hall states that:

"There were many and varied cultural trends and tendencies in the Britain of the mid-sixties, but *socially* this was the period in which the 'progressive middle classes' came closest to establishing a social hegemony."¹⁹

There are some important differences between these writers. Martin argues that the progressive middle class appropriation of popular culture involved a misrecognition of working class youth culture. Popular cultural forms such as pop music had been the preserve of working class youth in the 1950s; in the late sixties rock was extremely popular with middle class young people, but the form had been changed, with negative consequences for its original consumers.²⁰ Martin considers youth culture to be a subordinate group within a working class parent culture and that the former, despite the presence within it of moments of licensed liminal excess, was mainly engaged in the rituals of collectivist symbolism rather than functioning to facilitate individual self-expression.²¹ The progressive middle class mistook this licensed liminality for a whole culture, Martin argues.²² Significantly, Martin's approach makes no attempt to suggest a division between traditional and contemporary popular culture within which the former was authentic, the latter degraded. Although the working class was not subjected to mass culture theory in Martin's account she characterised the way in that class used mass-produced cultural forms as

¹⁷ Hall 1980 p18

¹⁸ Hall 1980 p16

¹⁹ Hall 1980 p38

²⁰ Martin 1983 pp153-184

²¹ Martin 1983 pp136-152

²² Martin 1983 p122

traditional: rock music functioned within working class youth culture as a means to assert group identity.

Sinfield places much greater emphasis on the connection between the progressive middle class search for the vital and authentic and its simultaneous dismissal of mass culture. The New Left subculture's desire to find authentic modes of expression (jazz in the 1950s, for example) was intrinsically connected to a view of contemporary mass culture as manipulative and degraded.²³ Nor does Sinfield have any particular commitment to a notion of traditional working class culture, especially if that sense of tradition were to imply limited horizons with respect to either cultural expression or material progress. Indeed, to read the image on the front cover of his book in a particular way would imply that there were a connection (albeit one that had been suppressed during the long moment of post-war welfare culture) between those working class children from the early 1940s and the gay and lesbian rights marchers of the 1980s. It implies that within working class culture was a suppressed, marginalised presence of those nascent forms of countercultural expression which Martin locates firmly within the progressive middle class. At the risk of considerable over-simplification one might suggest that Sinfield saw that in the post-war period there was too little modernisation, whilst Martin believed there was far too much; but both blamed the progressive middle class for this state of affairs.

Both Sinfield and Martin consider a situation within which structural transformations had produced greater social mobility and the growth of a middle class excessively concerned with culture and the fulfilment of its expressive needs. Both see the interest in working class culture during the sixties as, primarily, linked to the cultural propensities of the progressive middle class.

Both Hall and Martin use Bernstein's ideas on progressive education in support of their argument. For Hall sixties progressive pedagogy could be compared to other areas where there were "shifts in symbolic codes and coding, [such as]

²³ Sinfield 1989 pp152-181; pp232-252

sex and aesthetics.”²⁴ He agrees with Martin that there was a close correspondence between these shifts and the progressive middle class, but places the latter within what was, effectively, a struggle across many fronts to reconfigure the post-war settlement, a struggle which amounted “to something like a ‘crisis’ in the sphere of social reproduction.”²⁵ Hall argues that:

“though no one particular class fraction grasped the full dimensions of this crisis in a lucid, circumscribing glance, it had a particular resonance for that fraction. They came to recognise themselves, for a time, as the interpellated ‘subjects’ of its revised doctrine of moral conduct.”²⁶

This revised moral doctrine resulted in the 1960s in the Home Office reforms, the “most distinctive, ‘posthumous’ political expression”²⁷ of a process which had been far broader in scope than the largely technical and scientific and state-sponsored modernisation advanced by Harold Wilson in 1964. Labour revisionism had envisaged a thoroughgoing moral, cultural and ethical reform “which was slowly eroded and undermined through the deepening economic and political crisis of the sixties.”²⁸

The progressive middle class was deeply implicated in sixties modernisation, in Hall’s estimation, and there was a strong connection between its cultural style and the ways in which it promoted change, and Hall also acknowledged that the individualism which was at the core of revisionist doctrine did not indicate unqualified freedom. The progressive middle class supported cultural and moral reforms involving new modes of regulation, not the absence of control, and this was evident across the whole spectrum from education to the Home Office reforms. Hall argues that the latter were part of a restructuring of moral regulation which could not be characterised as “permissive” in any simple

²⁴ Hall 1980 p42

²⁵ Hall 1980 p40

²⁶ Hall 1980 p40

²⁷ Hall 1980 p35

²⁸ Hall 1980 p36

sense, and [that] there was no “single, uncontradictory tendency ... to be discovered.”²⁹

The significance of Hall’s discussion is that he places the progressive middle class within the context of a broad, sixties struggle over hegemony, but in particular that this struggle had a significant spatial dimension. As Martin has also implied, many of the conflicts during the sixties were concerned with space. But space could be symbolic and a product of the cultural imagination and one aspect of the early 1960s culture of the New Left (as well as later) was the extent to which claims about changing class relations and increasing mobility and the political consequences of these were supported through assertions about space.

Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy*: Space and Marginality

The Uses of Literacy must be seen as a key text in any discussion of the early New Left’s response to the type of cultural modernisation discussed by Hall, Sinfield and Martin. Hoggart’s book is generally read as a highly contentious account, nostalgic in its approach to traditional working class culture and dismissive of contemporary popular culture as crudely manipulative. But Hoggart doesn’t only consider the impact of mass culture on the working class community, his book is also concerned with forms of upward mobility which seemed to be producing a cohort of individuals existing within the upper margins of the working class, a group which seemed to have no small resemblance to the emerging counterculture.

At the beginning of *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart described exactly who his book was concerned with:

“The ‘working classes’ described here live in districts such as Hunslet (Leeds), Ancoats (Manchester), Brightside and Attercliffe (Sheffield), and off the Hessele

²⁹ Hall 1980 p7

and Holderness Roads (Hull). My fullest experience is of those who live in the miles of smoking and huddled working class houses in Leeds.”³⁰

As the last sentence indicates, Hoggart sought a particular kind of legitimacy for his study by connecting it to his own personal experience. But strictly speaking the book is less concerned with the aforementioned groups, who might be defined as the traditional working class, than it is with the disintegration of these communities as a result of a variety of pressures. The latter, Hoggart would acknowledge, but we could go further and suggest that this image of class and the landscape which contained it is itself the result of a particular approach. As Colin Sparks has observed: “A large part of the definition of working class in this book is geographical, and it is supplemented by a vision through the lenses of consumption, leisure and home.”³¹ Hoggart’s cultural geography and landscape is critical to the definition of class in the book, effectively naturalising its subject, giving its domestic interiors a matter of factness which can then be contrasted to inauthentic cultural space: “The warm glow of Hunslet is balanced against the neon and plastic of the 1950s.”³²

One of the foremost ways in which Hoggart established his sense of class was through description of the working class home. The domestic interior of many working class households, for example, “is still largely Edwardian, their living rooms little changed from the time they equipped them or took them over from their parents.”³³ Comfortable and homely the living space was: “elaborate and disorderly and yet sober: it is not chintzy or kittenish or whimsical or ‘feminised.’ “³⁴ Even though things were changing and many homes now contained mass-produced artefacts from the chain-stores: “bad veneer and sprayed-on-varnish-stain, is replacing the old mahogany; multi-coloured plastic and chrome biscuit barrels and bird-cages have come in,”³⁵ Hoggart considered that cluttered and elaborate as this interior might be it was unconsciously meaningful in terms of the function of the home: “in homes, the new things are absorbed into a kind of

³⁰ Hoggart 1957 p19

³¹ Sparks 1974 p11

³² Sparks 1974 p8

³³ Hoggart 1957 p31

³⁴ Hoggart 1957 p40

whole instinctively reached after.”³⁶ This was in sharp contrast to public spaces such as cafes and hotels where modern design, unconstrained by working class domestic culture, had lost its connection with meaning and value:

“the walls in several hostile shades of distemper, clashing strips of colour along their centre; cold and ugly plastic door-handles; fussy and meaningless wall lamp-holders; metal tables which invite no one and have their over-vivid colours kicked and scratched away: all tawdry and gimcrack.”³⁷

So, working class culture with its clear and delineated boundaries, hermetic and separate from the rest of society could absorb the worst of modern design and not be undermined by it, in contrast to public culture. The most notorious examples of the latter were those spaces frequented by the “juke-box boys:”

“the milk bars indicate at once, in the nastiness of their modernistic knick-knacks, their glaring showiness, an aesthetic breakdown so complete that, in comparison with them, the layout of the living-rooms in some of the poor homes from which the customers come seems to speak a tradition as balanced and civilised as an eighteenth-century town house.”³⁸

The milk bars were sordid spaces, dominated by aimlessness, desperation and futility; the main reason to go there was to “put copper after copper into the mechanical record player,” and as with much that Hoggart found abhorrent in contemporary culture there was the ubiquitous presence of *modernismus*: “The young men waggle one shoulder or stare, as desperately as Humphrey Bogart, across the tubular chairs.”³⁹

The landscapes of working class life depicted by Hoggart are dramatic, but as well as being descriptive of ‘real’ space these are also ideological constructions within which the presence of clear and fixed boundaries between different social

³⁵ Hoggart 1957 p35

³⁶ Hoggart 1957 p40

³⁷ Hoggart 1957 p40

³⁸ Hoggart 1957 p247-248

³⁹ Hoggart 1957 p248

spaces was imperative. *The Uses of Literacy* privileged and visualised highly distinct domestic interiors in particular; enclosed and sharply delineated, these spaces could then be contrasted to the condition of dangerous and unbounded liminality which persisted on the margins of the putatively traditional working class community. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides one way of appreciating this. Bourdieu has argued that: "...the habitus implies a 'sense of one's place' but also a 'sense of the other's place'. For example, we say of an item of clothing, a piece of furniture or a book: 'that's petty-bourgeois' or 'that's intellectual.'" ⁴⁰ *Habitus*, according to Kim Dovey, is:

"a set of practical taxonomies...which are embodied in the everyday lifeworld of experience and action ... forms of 'habit' and 'habitat'...The *habitus* is... a set of structured beliefs about reality. Whilst it is a set of acquired dispositions, it is also necessary to any world view."⁴¹

Habitus is not just physical space occupied by someone or some group, therefore, but it is a way in which the world is appropriated as well as imagined. The term can be applied to *real* physical spaces such as motorways, schools and houses, but also to the imagined space of literature, television and the cinema, to discourses *about* space that appear in debates concerning architecture and design, and to the systems of values and beliefs present in everyday life.

Whilst in Hoggart the spaces of modern consumer culture are contrasted to the authenticity of the traditional working class community, there is also an underlying antagonism between respectable working class culture and its 'rough' or *lumpen* variants,⁴² the differences often signified by a comparison of domestic space. *Coronation Street* presented a view of working class culture which was closely based on Richard Hoggart's view and Terry Lovell has commented that in the early episodes the fecklessness of the Tanner household

⁴⁰ Bourdieu 1990 p113

⁴¹ Dovey 1999 p18

⁴² This was a long-established view which informed much of the middle class patronage of the working class in the late 19th century. See the extensive literature on the culture of the 'labour aristocracy', for example.

is contrasted with the cosy respectability of the Barlow's home, signified through the different qualities of their interiors.⁴³

Bernice Martin has also argued that traditional working class culture was marked by palpable divisions between rough and respectable. Partly this was as a defence mechanism: "the working class culture of control" which separated the respectable from the "lumpen undermass" had "evolved precisely to make possible some degree of personal autonomy in conditions of scarcity and insecurity."⁴⁴ But this was not simply a necessary defence mechanism designed to ensure the maintenance of a dignified existence but it had also a deeper significance. Traditional working class life was marked by comprehensible boundaries, dividing the spaces of existence, giving them fixed and clear meanings. Although there was always a space within working class culture for vulgarity and liminality such experiences were confined within strict and defined boundaries – the pub, the football terrace, or more recently, youth culture. But the spaces of respectable culture dominated most people's lives for most of the time, involved as they were in the business of maintaining for themselves a degree of material and psychological security.

Mass-culture was clearly perilous in Hoggart's opinion but the condition of marginality to the working class community would appear to have been a more fundamental danger. At the conclusion of the second chapter, entitled 'Landscape with figures: a setting', Hoggart visualised what could happen to those individuals who through bereavement or other misfortune were excluded from the totality of working class life in all its "peculiarly gripping wholeness,"⁴⁵ which could "be seen at its most pathetic in those old men who filled the reading-room of the branch public libraries." This is a shocking image, the library in this sequence having the same symbolic value as the "common lodging-house" which solitary old men found themselves forced to inhabit, and the railway station which the "older ones haunt... along with some of the

⁴³ Lovell 1996 p166

⁴⁴ Martin 1983 p215

⁴⁵ Hoggart 1957 p68

mentally deficient.”⁴⁶ These representations are not of the recent culture which Hoggart found so troubling; in fact they have the atmosphere of the workhouse in their bleakness. These spaces had a place in working class culture, but as:

“the special refuge of the misfits and left-overs, of the hollow-cheeked, watery-eyed, shabby and furtively sad. An eccentric absorbed in the rituals of his monomania sits between a pinched unmarried brother, kept by a married sister for the sake of his war-pension, and an aged widower from a cheap lodging or a house smelling permanently of old tea and the frying-pan.”⁴⁷

The contrast between the foregoing sections of the chapter is marked, suggestive of unfulfilment in the lives of those outside the warm embrace of a respectable community. But for those who failed to recognise their own lives in Hoggart’s “homely” and “neighbourly” community, this description of life on the margins as in general the consequence of either unavoidable and tragic misfortune or of a condition ranging from eccentricity to mental defectiveness must produce a sense of unease. Caroline Steedman’s autobiographical account of her fifties girlhood discussed “.. lives lived on the borderlands, lives for which the central interpretative devices of the culture don’t quite work,”⁴⁸ and saw in Hoggart’s description of working class domesticity a landscape which was both unfamiliar and oppressive.

Hoggart’s hostility to mass-culture, and his unease with respect to various forms of social mobility, was articulated in contrast to traditional working class life with its rigid boundaries, and the values of the enclosed and protective community were in some sense confirmed by the terrifying example of those excluded through fecklessness or misfortune. But there were also those ‘eccentrics’ who chose exclusion; and by the 1950s this group was apparently on the increase. Martin also recognised a huge gap between working class respectability and the unconventionality which was a feature of new forms of middle class culture, the

⁴⁶ Hoggart 1957 p69

⁴⁷ Hoggart 1957 p70

⁴⁸ See Steedman 1986 p5, quoted in Lovell 1996 p157

latter comparable in many respects to the culture of the “lumpen undermass.”⁴⁹ These forms of middle class culture, once confined to enclaves of artistic bohemia were, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, becoming far more widespread.

In fact Hoggart displayed a certain degree of ambivalence with respect to the group he described as the “Scholarship Boy.”⁵⁰ On the one hand the university educated are considered, the professor, professional journalist, or successful executive who despite their achievements remain insecure and uncertain about themselves, but his main interest is for the “working class boys who are only moderately endowed, who have talent sufficient to separate them from the majority of their working class contemporaries, but not to go much further.”⁵¹ This group “are to be found frequently among minor clerks and similarly black-coated workers, and among elementary school teachers, especially in the big cities.”⁵² But the most interesting facet of Hoggart’s interest in this group is how they are positioned culturally.

Hoggart in part defines this group through the language of modernism. In *The Uses of Literacy* modernism functioned as a signifier of something distasteful in contemporary society, although Hoggart’s repeated use of the term *modernismus* raises some interesting questions as to what it was he thought objectionable. Since the 19th century, cultural critics had been offended at the style of artefacts mass-produced for the consumer market and Hoggart’s distaste for “bad veneer and sprayed-on-varnish-stain”⁵³ would not have been out of place in Ruskin. Whilst equally meaningless for the cultural critic, American inspired design would have been a good deal more polished and more connotative of modernity, “streamlined perambulators or square clocks,”⁵⁴ the tailfins of vehicles associated with ‘Detroit styling,’ or the juke-box or “mechanical record player,” as Hoggart quaintly refers to it. *Modernismus* was connotative of the European avant-garde and the *Bauhaus*, but was also used

⁴⁹ Martin 1983 p215

⁵⁰ Hoggart 1957 pp291-304

⁵¹ Hoggart 1957 p293

⁵² Hoggart 1957 p300

⁵³ Hoggart 1957 p40

in the fifties in Britain to imply the corruption of the latter within the mass-market; “chain store modernismus,”⁵⁵ as Hoggart termed it. Hoggart’s objections to modernism have some relevance to debates about design which preceded and followed on from the Festival of Britain.

The public design culture associated with the Festival was in fact at a considerable distance from the severe functionalism of the central European modernism associated with the *Bauhaus*, generally avoiding the coldness of strictly utilitarian design in favour of a softer style considered to bridge the gap between a functionalist aesthetic and popular taste. This design culture was disseminated within the public institutions of the Welfare State: It was in “a bright, pastel-shade distempered and tubular furnished waiting room of a children’s clinic”⁵⁶ where Hoggart collected his examples of a persistent oral tradition, used at the beginning of the first chapter. This type of design was not to be found within popular consumer culture, however, but it was favoured by the expanding middle class which had an interest in modern design, problematically in Hoggart’s opinion. At the end of a chapter the substance of which was a sustained assault on the intellectual pretensions of formerly working class individuals now occupying an uneasy position within the middle class, Hoggart ridiculed the domestic living space of this group, which showed little confidence or independence of taste, not “chintzy” and having “lost the cluttered homeliness of their origins,” the overall impression was of “an anonymous public air, similar to that of unrelieved utility furniture.” Their homes were less liveable than “intensely self-conscious” and

“designed for effect, for culturally keeping up with the Koestlers. There is little healthy untidiness, natural idiosyncrasy, straight choice of what is personally liked. There is no plain vulgarity unless certain identified vulgarities have become fashionable.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jones 1951 p9, quotation from Massey 1995 p6

⁵⁵ Hoggart 1957 p35

⁵⁶ Hoggart 1957 p27

⁵⁷ Hoggart 1957p311

Whilst *The Uses of Literacy* is predominantly a critique of the impact of mass-produced culture on the working class, a culture influenced from America which was considered to be shallow as well as damaging, the culture favoured by the newly middle class was both European in origin and, Hoggart seemed to suggest, too clever by half:

“They tend to read bitterly ironic or anguished literature – Waugh, Huxley, Kafka, and Greene... They know a little, but often only from reviews and short articles, about Frazer and Marx... They sometimes listen to talks on the Third Programme with titles like ‘The Cult of Evil in Contemporary Literature... Some have a precarious tenancy in several near - intellectual worlds.”⁵⁸

Hoggart’s criticisms of mass-culture were ill informed but reflected the prevailing assumptions of the time which certainly had a widely accepted currency within the left. His views on the culture of modernism, however, reveal a provincial bigotry which appears now quite distasteful; the notion of the new middle class “keeping up with the Koestlers”⁵⁹ sounds smug and intolerant if not to say xenophobic. And one wonders exactly who he had in mind. Some years later Jeff Nuttall gave his observations on attending one of Arnold Wesker’s regional arts festivals which took place in 1964. It was an event attended by trade unionists, had the atmosphere of “a real working class dance,” but the New Left was also there:

“Wesker and a group of his friends are drinking in one corner. A shrill Central European accent and a self-regarding *ULR* blah ride prettily above the singsong Midland voices. The olive complexions stand out among the beer flushed pinks of the locals. An anti-semitist sneer flickers subtly around the faces of a group of teds. Elsewhere in the city Bob Davenport and a crowd of fellow folk singers are clearing the public bars at a brisk rate.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Hoggart 1957p309

⁵⁹ Hoggart 1957 p311

⁶⁰ Nuttall 1970 p56

The New Left in Nuttall's opinion were from the progressive middle class (and possibly European in origin) but Hoggart's group could only hover on the fringes of such a culture. A taste for "anguished literature"⁶¹ amongst certain sections of the populace was not as a consequence of formal education. Unconventional behaviour was easy to dismiss as that of the "eccentric absorbed in the rituals of his monomania,"⁶² who was to be found in "the special refuge of the misfits and left-overs,"⁶³ the reading room of the public library, and this individual was bordering on the psychotic in Hoggart's estimation. Those who might be considered weird by normal standards were, nevertheless, becoming more numerous, and this greatly disturbed Hoggart.

So far it has been suggested that Hoggart's account of the traditional working class community was not only flawed in terms of its assessment of mass-culture but that this account is also defective as a result of a particular construction of space, one which visualises the working class *habitus* in terms of rigidly demarcated boundaries. Marginality to working class culture was prohibited therefore by the very method through which it was depicted. Hoggart's employment of this approach can explain the structure of meaning which *The Uses of Literacy* exhibits, the ways in which the text constructs an antagonism between traditional working class culture and newer cultural forms. Hoggart's antipathy to autodidactic culture seems harder to account for.

As a scholarship boy himself Hoggart would surely have appreciated the benefits of gaining access to an education, even whilst troubled by the loss of community which this apparently entailed. Previously the only routes to intellectual ideas would have been through formal education available to an elite; through the institutions of workers education and the Left, especially the Communist Party; but also the culture of the autodidact, an unconventional route to self-improvement which had long preceded Hoggart's own childhood. Furthermore, if one examines the historical evidence it is apparent that the oral culture which Hoggart extolled was not always positively regarded. Robert Robert's account of early 20th century Salford life indicated a cohort of working

⁶¹ Hoggart 1957p309

⁶² Hoggart 1957 p70

class men and women of high intelligence, the vast majority of which remained “chained socially and economically within their own society... They talked more, read more and possessed a much larger vocabulary than their neighbours in general.”⁶⁴ This was not, though, “the odd queer customer seeking to get on by attending trade classes at night school,” as Hoggart would have had him, but a group who were “an integral part of the working community.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, argues Roberts, these individuals were impatient “with the many stale saws and clichés that peppered working class talk,” aspects of the oral tradition which seemed limiting and redundant.

Hoggart disparaged the autodidact as a strange fellow, inhabiting spaces marginal to the mainstream of working class life, alienated from the host culture and doomed to failure in any other. But, as Roberts suggests, whilst the autodidact may have been unconventional, he or she was not necessarily isolated from the larger community. And despite the purported wisdom that was to be found within the oral tradition it failed to satisfy much yearning for more substantial knowledge. But if Hoggart was dismissive of traditional forms of autodidactism the late fifties would see the emergence of self-education in new and more extensive institutional forms.

In the latter half of the fifties the British counterculture was in its early stages of development, particularly in terms of the availability of images of an alternative culture within the public domain. By the mid-sixties there was a countercultural press, an extensive literature in which certain texts achieved canonical status,⁶⁶ and a ‘rock’ culture with increasingly ‘high art’ pretensions, all of which now provided the material culture and the legitimacy for an alternative intellectual culture to which broader sections of the public could identify. The moment of *The Uses of Literacy* was immediately before the counterculture became a feature of the cultural landscape with stable and recognisable characteristics within public discourse, but for Hoggart’s readership in the 1950s there were two available ways of recognising these nascent cultural developments. Firstly,

⁶³ Hoggart 1957 p70

⁶⁴ Roberts 1973 p177; Rose 2002 p26

⁶⁵ Roberts 1973p177

via a characteristically British suspicion of foreign intellectual imports, as well as a long-standing awareness of indigenous literary and artistic bohemia with all of its eccentricities. Secondly, through the more recent example of CND and the New Left. The newly middle class, according to Hoggart, were liable to flirt with fashionably radical ideas and “are likely to believe in ‘freedom’ and to be ‘anti-authoritarian,’ ... they can enjoy the crackle of mainly borrowed ideas, can try to have at call a view on anything - on the H-Bomb, on ‘woman’s place,’ on modern art... [they] assimilate without absorbing, a great number of such items, to ‘have views’ at second, third, and fourth hand.”⁶⁷

The broader context for Hoggart’s book was the concern about class mobility and its effects. Class mobility in the late fifties and early sixties was a contentious matter, partly because it was seen to have unpredictable political consequences and partly because apparent transformations of the political landscape were widely believed to be bound up with detrimental cultural change. When Labour experienced a third successive election defeat in October 1959 the subsequent inquest attempted to explain this in terms of the cultural characteristics of the new working class. According to Hugh Gaitskell: “full employment, new housing, the new way of life based on the telly, the frig., the car and the glossy magazine”⁶⁸ all affected Labour’s political strength. Gaitskell and other politicians were merely articulating a widespread perception that the working class had been transformed during the post-war years and that the newer forms of recreation and entertainment were injurious to traditional and now declining forms of political consciousness, community and culture.⁶⁹

This perception was evident not just in political discourse but in cultural commentary, and in cinema and television representations. The working class was more visible in cinema and television in the late fifties and early sixties but this visibility took a nostalgic form; mourning for the loss of what was considered to be a traditional culture on the one hand, a distaste for contemporary mass culture on the other hand. Nostalgia is a form of memory predicated on the

⁶⁶ eg *Lord of the Rings*. See Glover 1984

⁶⁷ Hoggart 1957 p310

⁶⁸ Laing 1986 p3

perception that the remembered object is lost or disappearing, and that the present is an inferior and degraded experience by contrast. The notion of decline and decay as a consequence of *affluence*, a key term for political commentators as well as cultural critics, was central to the ways in which working class culture was represented.

Hoggart's anxieties concerning the fate of the upwardly mobile individual was widespread. In January 1958 a Cambridge student "with a cockney accent" had written to *The Times* to comment on a predicament faced by the working class boy who "far from worshipping at the shrine of his parents' income- group finds himself dissociated [and] despises the ignorance of those who were once his friends."⁷⁰ A typical representation of the scholarship boy was of a person of (now) indeterminate class, uprooted and probably dysfunctional, who figured in popular culture at the beginning of the sixties in the form of *Coronation Street's* Ken Barlow, home from university but painfully ill at ease with his working class parents.⁷¹ However, this pervasive image of the working class boy whose university education had permanently separated him from his family and community has come to represent what was in reality a somewhat more complex situation in the late 1950s. A large numbers of children from the working class and lower middle class benefited from state education and qualified for professional or, more frequently, white collar jobs, the vast majority of whom did not encounter higher education, nor the separation from their families which a university education in Britain traditionally involved, let alone the estranging experience of Oxbridge. What is evident in *The Uses of Literacy* is that Hoggart is discussing this broader group, not those who benefited from a university education (as had Hoggart) but the much larger mass of, mainly, boys whose grammar school education facilitated their entry into white collar jobs and the lower stages of professional careers. Hoggart's concern about this group, furthermore, is not their inability to function in middle class society but their exaggerated sense of their own intellectual abilities and their misguided taste in

⁶⁹ See Tiratsoo 1991

⁷⁰ Laing 1984 p170

⁷¹ For such a view of the pain and embarrassment of class mobility one could go back further, to Pip in *Great Expectations*

culture. The term had not yet gained currency, but Hoggart's jaundiced view of this group seemed to be one which regarded it as countercultural.

The British New Wave and the New Left

If Hoggart's text expressed a disquiet with the emergence of a disaffected cultural minority on the upper margins of the working class, the British New Wave in film might be read as the cultural expression of that minority group, representing its viewpoint and its dilemmas. A number of different readings of the significance of this sequence of films will be considered below, the differences between accounts hinging either on these film's status as realistic representations of working class culture, or as representing the class position of a more dislocated social group. Arthur Marwick reads them, somewhat simplistically, as the making visible of a group previously marginalised and as candid portrayals of working class life. Sinfield uses the New Wave to illustrate his thesis concerning the phenomenon of left culturalism and regards the films as symptomatic of a view of working class culture which is dismissive of contemporary consumption patterns whilst applauding its purportedly authentic and vitalistic elements. Lovell and, especially, Hill perform closer textual readings of the films, the substance of which is to suggest that the subject of these films is not the apparent one but its progressive middle class audience.

Marwick has discussed, with respect to the New Wave and the novels upon which these films were based, "the emergence of a cohort of working class, lower-middle class, and provincial writers in Britain from the late fifties onwards"⁷² who were then assisted in bringing their material to the screen by "well-disposed mediators from the established social classes."⁷³ Marwick cites testimony from Roy Boulting, concerning his film *I'm Alright Jack* (1959), who had stated that he "had become very conscious of the shifts in class relationships and wanted to record them in this new film,"⁷⁴ although this film was distinct from the "serious working class dramas which were to follow."⁷⁵ One of the things Marwick means by the latter comment is "down to earth and

⁷² Marwick 1998 p117

⁷³ Marwick 1998 p118

⁷⁴ Marwick 1998 p119

naturalistic,”⁷⁶ as is observed about the novel of *Room at the Top*, and it was frankness in dealing with the rigidities of class and the realities of sex which characterised the film of this book. Marwick provides evidence based largely on his readings of this sequence of novels and films to support his view that class was an overarching theme within these, as well as making the rather different point, concerning the novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, that they brought to recognition: “the importance of hitherto neglected geographical and social sections of British society,”⁷⁷ and with regard to the film of the novel, of allowing “the voices of anger, kitchen sink, provinces, and working class to be heard.”⁷⁸ And also with respect to *This Sporting Life*, that it was: “a film with a working class hero, and also a working class heroine, and one which continues the process of making the working class *visible*.”⁷⁹

Because these films treated their subject matter with candour, and because they regarded both ‘rough’ and ‘respectable’ within the working class as authentic, they are distinct from Hoggart’s approach. But making a subject *visible* is a complex process and the notion of ‘realism,’ most frequently associated with these films, is a problematic one.

Hill has suggested that realism, rather than being a matter of aesthetic style or technique, is more bound up with “a social extension, the inclusion of hitherto neglected sections of the population..., usually part of a broader claim to legitimacy by a social group or at least a social syntax not specifically aesthetic.”⁸⁰ The realism that began to be deployed in British cinema during the 1950s was a response to developments in British capitalism associated with full employment and advances in living standards, perceived especially by the left to have undermined support for socialism within Labour’s traditional constituency. That a number of films represented the manual working class as having “an authenticity and vitality absent from mass, and indeed probably

⁷⁵ Marwick 1998 p121

⁷⁶ Marwick 1998 p122

⁷⁷ Marwick 1998 p129

⁷⁸ Marwick 1998 p129

⁷⁹ Marwick 1998 p140

⁸⁰ Hill 1979 p126

middle class culture”⁸¹ was in the context of an alleged decline in that class, however, which was understood to shift responsibility for struggle onto socialist intellectuals and dissenting movements such as CND.

The ‘realism’ of British realist cinema in the late fifties and early sixties can be understood as one component of an historical conjuncture which was partly the consequence of a series of structural transformations within post-war capitalism associated with a deepening prosperity, or ‘affluence’, the growth of the middle class and the extension of cultural attitudes connected with the latter to sections of the working class. Partly, this realism was also a cultural response engendered by these structural transformations, not a description of the reality of the period as such but a representation of the social formation within which were contained a series of underlying moral and aesthetic judgements which, because of the way that realism functions, were taken at face value as incontrovertible evidence of social fact. On the surface, therefore, the sixties New Wave films had as their subject working class culture, but that which was signified by these films was something far more complex and contestable.

Terry Lovell, writing about the New Wave, has stated that: “there is one category of viewer in particular who is best placed to enjoy the pleasures of these texts from that space, namely Hoggart’s scholarship boy: the adult working class male looking back with nostalgia at a remembered childhood landscape.”⁸²

Although we have demonstrated that it is not the case that *The Uses of Literacy* shares the same assumptions about working class culture as these films, there is some common ground. The next section of this discussion will consider the kind of engagement with working class culture that can be found in the New Wave. The way in which the working class was represented in these films was different to that prevailing in an earlier period. Terry Lovell observed that the “basis on which the British New Wave staked its cinematic claims was a realism defined in terms of its working class subject, and a more open treatment of

⁸¹ Hill 1979 p128

sexuality,”⁸³ and with regard to the former characteristic she made a comparison between these films and David Lean’s *Brief Encounter* (1945):

“Set in the North of England, so far as one can tell from road signs and railway announcements, its ‘upstairs’ characters spoke impeccable standard English while ‘downstairs’ (or rather, behind the counter in the station tea-room) they sported cockney – the multi-purpose accent which was made to serve for *all* working class speech.”⁸⁴

Lean’s film used its working class characters as a humorous counterpoint to the action between the deeply earnest Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard. In contrast the New Wave dealt with its working class subjects seriously, but does this imply that these films were ‘realistic’ in their treatment of working class culture? John Hill’s exemplary study of the New Wave has tackled this notion of realism in considerable depth, recognising that these films had such an impact at the time of their release because of their evident determination to tackle “‘real’ social issues and experiences”⁸⁵ in a direct and forthright style. New Wave cinema with its use of location shooting, regional actors and occasional improvised performance stood in sharp contrast to the apparent phoney ness of studio-bound film of the fifties, yet, Hill argued, such an innovation had less to do with the accurate depiction of an external referent than with the rejection of earlier conventions of representation. It was significant that New Wave cinema depicted previously marginalised social groups but this was not to be regarded as an uncovering of reality in any unproblematic sense.

Realism, then, did more than to “merely duplicate the surface realities of working class life.”⁸⁶ Employing an approach developed by Roland Barthes, Hill has argued with regard to the New Wave that there is a “deployment of actions and, especially, locations which are ostensibly non-functional, which only

⁸² Lovell 1996 p171

⁸³ Lovell 1996 p168

⁸⁴ Lovell 1996 p168

⁸⁵ Hill 1986 p127

⁸⁶ Hill 1986 p129

loosely fit into the logic of narrative development.”⁸⁷ One explanation for this is that these films, precisely because they contained “residual elements” unconnected to the narrative, could perform the function of signifying reality itself, because they were not “used up in the narrative process; providing neither narrative information nor character insight.”⁸⁸

It may be the case, therefore, that the representation of working class culture in the early sixties was motivated by concerns specific to the New Left and to the class fraction with which it was principally associated. In Lowenstein’s discussion of the critical reception of Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960) in contrast to Jack Clayton’s *Room at the Top* (1959), he suggested that the outrage that greeted the former in comparison to the adulatory response to the latter was to do with the contemporary social crisis which then became manifest in certain, socially determined, expressions of taste. Whilst *Room at the Top* had attracted the notorious ‘X Certificate’, previously reserved for sexually exploitative, violent or horrific films of dubious quality, many enthusiasts were pleased that this classification could now be used to signify serious, adult art cinema.⁸⁹ The type of ‘adult’ content which *Room at the Top* contained was in keeping with a “gritty, spare aesthetic”⁹⁰ originating in the Free Cinema documentaries of the mid-fifties, films which aimed at a realistic and blunt portrayal of working class life.

But this enthusiasm for documenting working class culture in stark and unsentimental detail was shaped by the cultural reference points and sensibilities of Britain’s New Left. This had been the case with the example of Free Cinema, as Hill’s comparison of Lindsay Anderson’s *O Dreamland* (1953) and *Everyday Except Christmas* (1957) illustrates. Both documented working class culture but the latter was a positive affirmation of working life and the larger community that lay behind it; the former concerned itself with working class leisure, representing this as a “degrading spectacle” intended for a

⁸⁷ Hill 1986 p129

⁸⁸ Hill 1986 p132; Barthes 1978 p134

⁸⁹ Murphy 1992 p15

⁹⁰ Lowenstein 2000 p225

“moronic mass audience.”⁹¹ But this preference for the traditional in contrast to the newer, leisure-based, forms of working class culture was represented to the audience through the deployment of consciously ‘artistic’ techniques which would be familiar to the type of audience to which the films were addressed.

Hill makes the point, drawing from work done originally by Andrew Higson, that the New Left had a distinctive aesthetic. Hill dismisses those accounts which crudely explained New Wave cinema in terms of the bourgeois origins of the filmmakers and argues instead that it is not the social background of the latter which is of significance but the inscriptions *within* the films which created an unmistakable distance between “observer and observed.”⁹² Hill’s analysis is detailed but can be simplified by reference to Higson’s idea of “That Long Shot Of Our Town From That Hill.”⁹³ The long shot has the effect of distancing the [middle class] observer from the world below. It is this aerial viewpoint of the city which, above all, subordinates the working class subjects of the films to an aesthetics of visual pleasure.

In *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* Alan Sinfield discusses one scene from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, significant for the way in which music was used. An early scene in the film involved an enthusiastic pub crowd singing ‘Lily of Laguna’, a song which had been “attributed by Hoggart to the ‘finest period in English urban popular song.’”⁹⁴ Earlier in the evening Adam Faith’s ‘What Do you Want if you Don’t Want Money’ had played on the pub jukebox with little response from the people in the pub. Elsewhere in the film rock music was used to signify aggression and danger. Sinfield argues that pop music is therefore contrasted with traditional music, the former signifying danger and the trivial, the latter an authentic community culture.

Despite its evident popularity pop music was in general despised by Britain’s intelligentsia in the early sixties and frequently this was justified by way of

⁹¹ Hill 1986 p152. The latter quotation is Lindsay Anderson’s description of the popular cinema audience in 1948

⁹² Hill 1986 p133

⁹³ Hill 1986 p134; Higson 1996 p134

⁹⁴ Sinfield 1989 p164 quoting from Hoggart 1957 pp156-7

contrast with that which could be defined as authentic; traditional folk music that could be regarded as the genuine musical culture of the working class prior to the ravages of commercialisation. Ironically, the music hall 'tradition,' of which Hoggart would seem to approve, was despised by cultural critics in the late 19th century, for similar reasons; it was considered to be commercialised and inauthentic in contrast to a genuine folk music. Sinfield's discussion of this scene was in the context of a broader discussion of the attitudes towards popular culture of Britain's small but vocal intelligentsia, particularly their enthusiasm for jazz. And for Sinfield the most significant thing about *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was the soundtrack: "the score for the film as a whole has a discreet jazz ambience – its by Johnny Dankworth, the modern jazz band-leader. This is the choice of the director, made for those he hopes will really appreciate his film."⁹⁵ The New Wave was an 'art' cinema which largely appealed to the progressive middle class intelligentsia and reflected the tastes and attitudes of that class fraction, Sinfield argues.

Lowenstein compares the forms of viewing pleasure elicited in the New Wave cinema to "the ethnographic stance of an observer re-creating an unusual species in exacting 'authentic' detail."⁹⁶ Progressive middle class enthusiasm for working class culture was predicated, therefore, on a degree of distance as well as a careful selection of those authentic experiences that would appear valid and acceptable to that type of audience. For progressive minded people in fifties and early sixties Britain, authenticity usually signified a certain rawness, an unsophisticated candour, a truthfulness born of a necessary isolation from the corrupting influence of commercial culture. In his observations concerning *Room at the Top* Marwick noted that the novel's "down to earth and naturalistic"⁹⁷ character and that it dealt not just with class but also sex in a forthright manner was one of its qualities. Although Marwick's overall argument would seem to regard such developments as indicative of working class culture in the process of liberation from the constraints of censorship he does cite a

⁹⁵ Sinfield 1989 p164

⁹⁶ Lowenstein 2000 p227

⁹⁷ Marwick 1998 p122

telling comment from the film censor, John Trevelyan, with respect to his continued hostility to 'language' in films:

"I appreciate that words of this kind are normal in the speech of the type of people that the film is about but I have always found, strange though it may seem, that these are the very people who most object to this kind of thing on the screen."⁹⁸

If the New Wave had a positive attitude towards those marginal aspects of working class culture conceivable as vitalistic, authentic and honest, it had as dismissive a position towards mass-culture as was to be found in Hoggart. Whilst the New Wave purported to depict the working class in a direct and honest fashion it based its representations on the idea that the durability and strength of this group was founded on: "the intimate relationship between work and cultural identity, the strong sense of 'proletarian consciousness' characteristic of the 'occupational community' (in industries such as mining, for example)."⁹⁹ In contrast to this "the characteristics which most pre-eminently defined the 'new' working class were less work than leisure, patterns of consumption and recreational pursuits."¹⁰⁰

This celebration of the marginal aspects of working class culture can be found in numerous films of the New Wave in which the central character was alienated from the culture that surrounded him. Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Vic in *A Kind of Loving*, Colin in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, Billy in *Billy Liar* are all characterised by an interiority born of an inability to function within a society degraded by affluence, choosing existential rebellion, sex, art, conspicuous displays of anti-consumerism or fantasy as a way of coping.

The problem was that the working class, in terms of its political consciousness, was in decline, according to this scenario. Sometimes an ostentatious embrace

⁹⁸ Marwick 1998 p131

⁹⁹ Hill 1986 p154

¹⁰⁰ Hill 1986 p154

of working class culture was possible, such as in the form of the New Wave, but because the actual patterns of culture were different and were rejected, the New Left tended to sanction a political style which was largely symbolic; it represented idealised elements of working class culture.

The formation of the New Left was significant not just in the causes it embraced but in the political style to which it gave authority, and in this respect the early history of CND is significant. Even whilst the leadership of CND, an eminently respectable group of middle-aged individuals, directed their attention towards the single issue of disarmament, something peculiar was occurring on the Aldermaston marches, providing the event with its 'beatnik' image.¹⁰¹ This was a cultural politics unlike anything previously embraced by the traditional left, attracting an audience well beyond activists and participants. CND was in contrast to the left-wing politics of the preceding period peculiar because, although predominantly composed of middle class youth, its cultural style was antithetical to convention and respectability. Commenting on later events Nik Cohn described the dress on the student demonstrations in Britain during 1968:

"Setting out for the demos of 1968, the New Left looked much like Anthony Powell's Erridge in the *Music of Time* sequence, off to the Spanish Civil War '...a straggling beard and air of utter down-at-heelness.' "¹⁰²

The problem of political agency, which found cultural expression in the films of the British New Wave and in the sartorial style of youthful members of the New Left, was also expressed theoretically in the work of Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn. Anderson inaugurated, what has subsequently been described as, the Nairn-Anderson thesis in 1964, with his essay 'Origins of the Present Crisis,' published in the *New Left Review*. The central premise of the thesis was that Britain's 'crisis' was one of institutional archaism, the consequence of a failed 17th century bourgeois revolution and the presence of a supine bourgeoisie, the latter having periodically failed to provide the leadership for which it was historically destined. Related to this failure of bourgeois leadership was also

¹⁰¹ Young 1977

the failure of the working class to develop a suitably ambitious consciousness, an assertion which Anderson supported with evidence from Hoggart and the latter's description of "the dense, object-invested universe [which] is a monument to the positivity of the oldest working class in the world."¹⁰³ The significance of this statement is that it did not challenge Hoggart's analysis nor the reliability of his account, regarding instead 'traditional' culture as a blockage to the development of a thoroughly proletarian consciousness. A number of other historians and theorists have considered Britain's chronic difficulties to be a consequence of institutional archaism and have: "linked an archaic English culture, rooted in a peculiar class structure to national economic backwardness and decline."¹⁰⁴ Nairn and Anderson have provided the most coherent Marxist account, however, which nonetheless has attracted much criticism from other Marxists.¹⁰⁵

Whilst the critical debate around these accounts of Britain's historical development has been extensive, my approach is less interested in this debate than in the significance of Perry Anderson's 1964 essay as symptomatic of the moment of its publication, and as a view of Britain aimed at a particular audience at this time. The Nairn-Anderson thesis *can* represent the world view of sections of Britain's middle class, all too aware of their subordinate position, for whom the notion that their class had sold its "birthright for the accent of a gentleman"¹⁰⁶ was a useful and convincing narrative, suggestive as it was of an alternative historical vocation.

Anderson's essay would not have reached a massive audience but the views which it expressed had a wider currency within sixties Britain, illustrated by Andrew Sinclair's *The Breaking of Bumbo*,¹⁰⁷ a film released in 1970 but based on his novel written over a decade before. Sinclair's novel had concerned the attempt of a young army officer to lead a rebellion of his troops at the time of

¹⁰² Cohn 1971 p136

¹⁰³ Anderson 1992 p36

¹⁰⁴ Dave 2000 pp341-344. Dave lists Anthony Sampson, Martin J. Wiener, W.D. Rubinstein, and Corelli Barnett as examples.

¹⁰⁵ Eg Thompson 1978

¹⁰⁶ Anderson 1992 p45

¹⁰⁷ Sinclair 1970

the Suez crisis. The film updated this scenario to the student demonstrations of 1968 and featured a character type whose trajectory might have been determined by a reading of Anderson. Bumbo, an ineffectual and supine bourgeois figure, served as a young officer in a Guards regiment whilst spending his spare time on the fringes of swinging London. When it appeared that the troops would be called out to suppress the student demonstrations Bumbo attempted to lead them in rebellion but was 'broken' in what the Nairn-Anderson thesis might suggest to be a peculiarly British way. After attempting to stir-up his troops - decent, practical men but whose working class *Toryism* meant they shared none of their officer's eccentric ideas - the lead character, rather than facing a court-martial, was absorbed back into the establishment through the offer of an aristocratic marriage. Scenes of archaic, state ritual, enduring symbols from what Tom Nairn has described as *Ukainia*,¹⁰⁸ conclude the film. Whilst *The Breaking of Bumbo* concludes on a pessimistic note regarding the continuing problem of middle class agency, an ending which might confirm the Nairn-Anderson thesis, there was a moment in the film which had offered the glimpse of an alternative, in the form of the counterculture.

The Breaking of Bumbo drew on the ambivalent attitude towards working class culture that was also a feature of the New Wave. On the one hand the film represents a working class without consciousness, in the form of the common soldiers who might be defined, with the Nairn-Anderson thesis in mind, as a brutalised, deferential, plebeian mass: "... not a proletariat leavened by the side-effects of bourgeois modernisation, but a rough, blinkered beast blundering about in the dark."¹⁰⁹ On the other hand within sixties culture there was the figure of the 'scholarship boy', a person of indeterminate class, uprooted and

¹⁰⁸ The concept of Ukainia is Nairn's 'making strange' of the UK. In Ukainia, bizarre constitutional arrangements are given a Ruritarian gloss and are characterised by archaic ritual and pageantry. Nairn's most recent take on Blair has continued the theme, in *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* which represents the New Labour project as most directly comparable to the decaying Austro-Hungarian Empire represented in Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*.

¹⁰⁹ Dave 1997 p115, discusses the persistence of such a view of the working class in Britain which this quotation effectively encapsulates. *The Breaking of Bumbo* is a good example of what he defines as the Bourgeois Paradigm.

probably dysfunctional, which was how Hoggart represented him.¹¹⁰ But in *The Breaking of Bumbo* the scholarship boy has transmuted into someone quite distinct from this latter, awkward figure. A key moment in the film is when its eponymous hero meets a hitch-hiker, a working class boy who has gone to university; but this is no Ken Barlow. This scholarship boy has been expelled from his university for an act of rebellion, he lacks deference, he looks like a beatnik, and he is about to join a commune! In the words of Dennis Potter's protagonist, when speaking to his upper-class girlfriend, in *Stand-up Nigel Barton*: "The days of the timid, kow-towing little runt of a scholarship boy are long since over."¹¹¹ How did this situation come to be?

In terms of political attitudes the expansion of higher education in the sixties marked a turning-point. Although students, even in the late sixties, were never as radical as their image suggested¹¹² there was a decisive shift away from anxiety and deference, which characterised the new middle class in the fifties, towards a greater confidence. By 1963 surveys showed students to be generally more left-wing than their parents.¹¹³ This was a novel situation and an unforeseen consequence of modes of social mobility which would previously have produced a quiescent and conformist group. Even though the left-wing character of the student cohort may have been exaggerated, for the first time sizeable sections of young middle class people began to appear as a social 'problem,'¹¹⁴ a notion previously reserved for delinquent working class youth.

In fact this problem had two aspects to it, represented in two contemporary discourses. There had been the 'crisis' of working class youth which was addressed in government enquiries such as the *Albermarle Report* (1960), concerning itself with the problem of the teenage delinquent in the context of a prosperous society. By the sixties the focus had changed from that of delinquency to that of teenage sexual activity, after which there was a greater emphasis on the role of girls. The liberal establishment, those Marwick defines

¹¹⁰ For such a view of the pain and embarrassment of class mobility one could go back further, to Pip in *Great Expectations*

¹¹¹ Dennis Potter quoted in Sinfield 1989 p235

¹¹² Thomas 1998

¹¹³ Parkin 1968 pp170-71, cited in Sinfield 1989 p235

as the proponents of “measured judgement,”¹¹⁵ may have regarded youth culture as a problem to be addressed with sympathy, but from another perspective it was the solution to the difficulties related to structural transformation. Christine Geraghty has discussed the situation of the character, Jo (Rita Tushingham), in *A Taste of Honey* whose mother’s fecklessness leaves her adrift and without family, and who:

“attempt[s] to make for herself a kind of ‘youth culture’ in which she can literally feel at home. *A Taste of Honey* marks an early attempt at the creation of a proto-family in which support is given by members of the same generation, in a less restrictive but more careful way than that given by the family.”¹¹⁶

By the middle of the sixties, youth culture had ‘solved’ one of the problems of associated with structural change, by providing for those who could function in neither the traditional working class community nor respectable middle class society an alternative source of identification. But for those working class young people who achieved upward mobility, there was considered to be a different problem, associated with the apparent difficulties of leaving a working class community the ‘respectability’ of which a character such as ‘Jo’ had never experienced. In the course of the sixties, though, the scholarship boy would become increasingly implicated within youth culture, particularly in its countercultural and subversive forms.

Conclusion

Both Hoggart and the New Wave, it has been argued, were responses to cultural modernisation, addressing the perceived problems of social dislocation and mobility. Hoggart’s account of the working class community under threat from without also expressed considerable anxieties with respect to upward mobility and the emergence of a group of people occupying the upper margins of the working class and the lower reaches of the lower middle class. In one sense both *The Uses of Literacy* and the British New Wave have constructed

¹¹⁴ Especially from 1965 onwards with the panic over drugs. See Dorn 1980

¹¹⁵ Marwick 1998 p19

¹¹⁶ Geraghty 2001 p102

the same cultural object. Contained within each is the enclosed, traditional community located in a northern industrial town. There is the looming, disconcerting presence of contemporary mass culture. And there is the presence of another factor, the upwardly mobile individual who is unable to function within the traditional community.

Nevertheless, the difference between these two objects is in another sense fundamental and it relates to the position each adopted towards the marginal, alienated subject within the traditional working class community. Hoggart is disparaging of this type of marginal individual and cannot take their intellectual pretensions seriously, but in the New Wave film it is as if the individual whose plight is at its centre is already outside (and in the audience), able to identify with what seems to be an earlier version of himself.

This might indicate the complexity of patterns of social and cultural mobility in the late 1950s and early 1960s, something which Hoggart's (albeit jaundiced) view of marginality suggests. The predicament of that person in the audience for the New Wave film (who is interpellated) who recognised a version of himself in the protagonist, may well have been that of the scholarship boy, now sitting uncomfortably within the middle class. But this was only one version of social mobility via the state education system. The typical representation of such an individual implies a degree of estrangement from the parent community which may have been more partial and negotiated in the experiences of the great majority of grammar school educated children who did not attend university but who did take up white-collar jobs.

Marwick argued that the New Wave film was indicative of a situation whereby subordinate social groups established a more prominent position within the dominant culture, not just in the case of the working class but also those from lower middle class as well as 'regional' backgrounds. He also makes the important point that the period of the late fifties and early sixties in Britain which was sometimes characterised as 'classless' really signified a moment when certain cultural activities were shared by some, usually young, people,

irrespective of the class they came from.¹¹⁷ The provincial and lower middle class Paul McCartney who had found a satisfactory cultural milieu in the Liverpool art college scene found he could “plug into” a comparable London student environment, mixing with those with “a much more privileged upbringing than ours had been” who, nevertheless, “didn’t seem to be a snotty crowd.”¹¹⁸ There were some sections of the existing middle class, therefore, who were inclined towards integration with those from the working class with similar tastes and dispositions. What brought some working class and middle class youth together, however, was not the mass commercial culture which Hoggart and the majority of cultural commentators in Britain found so objectionable but, amongst other things, a highly mediated existentialism: “you’d be reading *On the Road* and they’d be reading *On the Road*. We’d be looking at the same kind of things.”¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, this increase in social and cultural mobility, allowing individuals of working class origin to move easily within a looser and more permissive society, occurred in the context of what some regarded as a prevailing ideology on the New Left. Sinfield argues that such an ideology had its origins within the long history of middle class dissent, extending back to the 19th century. The fundamental character of this dissent was not necessarily left-wing in nature, its principal objection being towards the culture of the business-oriented fraction of the middle class. Tom Nairn argues that middle class dissidence was essentially nostalgic and gestural and that it was:

“anti-machine, anti-money and anti-city. It was not, of course, anti-bourgeois, or designed to impede the serious accumulation of capital... It never intended to stop England becoming the world’s workshop; but it did aim to inject into that fate as high a degree of conservative stability and rank as history would permit.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Marwick 1998 p57

¹¹⁸ Paul McCartney quoted from Green 1998 pp46-7

¹¹⁹ Paul McCartney quoted from Green 1998 pp46-7

¹²⁰ Quoted in Sinfield 1989 pp42-43

This is the broader context into which the New Wave film is placed through the approaches taken by Hill, Sinfield and Lovell. These readings are compelling and have implications for the way in which the early sixties New Left might be understood. Lovell argued that the viewing pleasure that such a film might elicit would be nostalgic, which is to suggest not unalloyed joy but a more contradictory experience in which memory is combined with the pain of loss and the sense that the present is in some respects inferior by comparison. When one considers the typical protagonist in these films the dilemma he faces is partly the dead weight of tradition, the limits to material prosperity, confinement within a social condition offering limited opportunities, and the awful, suffocating influence of the British class structure. But also represented are the tedium and banality of contemporary popular culture and the degraded values of the new affluence.

Sinfield argues that to view contemporary society as corrupted by new mass cultural forms was a fundamental characteristic of the New Left during this period. The New Left was a subculture, according to Sinfield, meaning that it can be considered to be broader than the intellectuals and political activists associated with particular journals and publications and might be thought of as the audience for a particular type of cultural product, therefore; but this also meant that it was subordinate to a parent culture, namely the middle class (or its progressive fraction). Underlying this claim is the argument that the New Left failed to come to terms with processes of modernisation with which the working class was engaged (and from which it was benefiting), remaining in the grip of a debilitating nostalgia.

In other respects one can see that the New Left continued throughout its existence to rely upon earlier ways of thinking about culture and class, although not in a necessarily nostalgic way. One might consider Perry Anderson's 1964 essay. Anderson discussed the failure of the working class to have developed anything like an hegemonic ideology, and referred to: "The dense, object-invested universe described in *The Uses of Literacy* [which] is a monument to

the positivity of the oldest working class in the world.”¹²¹ One should note that Anderson did not question the reliability of Hoggart’s description of the working class; he took it as an all too accurate report of the limitations upon its consciousness, not a misrepresentation born of a flawed analysis. Hoggart, in contrast to Anderson, had perceived there to be no inherent defect in such a “dense, object-invested universe”, which he considered to be a source of strength, except, of course, for the fact that it was disappearing.¹²² In fact, as the example of the 1970 film, *The Breaking of Bumbo* suggested, there were prevailing assumptions on the left that even if the working class was incapable of performing its revolutionary function, as a consequence of limitations placed upon it by the peculiarities of Britain’s historical development, the counterculture might, nevertheless, act as an alternative site of authenticity. The New Left did tend towards the cultural politics of authenticity, which meant that the working class in particular and oppressed groups generally were given the characteristics of ‘otherness’, in contrast to those unfortunate, deluded individuals who had been incorporated into consumer society via such mechanisms as television.

Neither Hoggart nor the British New Wave seemed able to discuss the dislocation of the pre-existing class structure in terms other than this self-evident opposition between traditional and mass-culture. For all his faults, however, there is something valuable in Hoggart’s discussion of the predicament of the scholarship boy. Hoggart understands this in terms of social mobility and the tragic fate awaiting those who will end their lives on the periphery of the middle-classes. A detailed reading of this discussion reveals, however, a variety of individuals under the rubric of the scholarship boy, many of whom are conveniently assigned to the middle class (but not by Hoggart). Nevertheless, Hoggart is troubled by this group’s intellectual pretensions and their unfortunate taste for *modernismus*. He is dismissive of a group of individuals who, in a slightly different account, might be regarded as the organic intelligentsia of the working class. Whilst the New Wave seems more sympathetic it appears to be equally unable to regard any kind of intellectual or

¹²¹ Anderson 1992 p36

worthwhile cultural life as having the slightest possibility *within* the working class, the fate of individuals with such pretensions being to knuckle down to the grim reality (as in *A Kind of Loving*) or leave (as in *Billy Liar*¹²³).

But as the brief allusion to the fate of Paul McCartney suggests, things were a little more complicated, the new situation allowing for *contacts* between working-class, lower-middle-class and sections of the progressive middle-class intelligentsia, often through youth culture, the counterculture and not necessarily involving class mobility *per se*. There is, furthermore, an alternative to both the Hoggartian narrative of the scholarship boy and the progressive middle class's modernisation strategy, which is most interestingly to be found in the work of Reyner Banham, which will feature in the next chapter. Banham was a self-confessed scholarship boy but was unable to recognise anything of his own history in Hoggart's book. Banham, furthermore, had acquired his intellectual education by virtue of his involvement with design and the visual arts, not the 'Eng Lit' department, and this facilitated a rather different analysis of mass, popular culture and its relationship to sixties structural change.

¹²² See Hoggart 1957 pp169-205: 'Unbending the Springs of Action'

¹²³ See French 1966 and Lockett 2000

Chapter Three

British Pop Theory in the Early Sixties: Popular Culture Made Strange¹

“Progressive people, the people who are going to have to make social action, have got, somehow, to learn to ride with the real culture of the working classes as it exists now. It’s no good these well-meaning people deluding themselves with trad jazz and Morris dancing and reed thatching and all that. It is time for them to try to face up to Pop as the basic cultural stream of mechanised urban culture”²

“He seems to use pop art literally, believing in it as teenagers believe in the ‘top twenty’. In a sense, the appeal to common sources within a fine art context, one of the strongest original motives for using pop art has been lost. The new pop art painters use the mass media in the way that teenagers do, to assert, by their choice of style and goods, their differences from their elders and others”³

“Picasso is fine and so are comic books, but in between is the unspeakable middlebrow”⁴

Introduction

The first aim of this chapter is to consider those critical approaches to more orthodox New Left culture, associated with Pop theory. A key theme is that in the early sixties British Pop theorists applied unorthodox interpretations of modernist design theory to narratives of social and cultural change found within New Left culture. On the one hand, this approach questioned the separation of mass culture from traditional culture which was central to both Hoggart and the

¹ The concept of ‘making strange’ or ‘defamiliarisation’ was associated with Russian Formalism in the 1920s

² Banham 1981a P88

³ Lawrence Alloway, ‘Pop Art Since 1949,’ *The Listener* 27th December 1962, cited by Whiteley 2002 p89

⁴ Alloway 1957 p29, cited by Whiteley 2002 p103

New Wave, effectively promoting a reinterpretation of the past; on the other hand the view of social and cultural mobility represented in Hoggart's scholarship boy was radically reinterpreted, resulting in a different viewpoint on the dilemmas faced by progressively inclined individuals whose origins were within the working class. In the course of this, a very different view of popular culture emerged to that found in Hoggart, suggesting greater continuities with the past and questioning the notion of cultural decline. This view of popular culture, whilst no longer dismissive of mass produced cultural forms was, nevertheless, selective and was far from uncritical of mainstream and popular taste.

The last chapter had discussed the different ways in which Hoggart and the New Wave dealt with cultural change, and concluded that what distinguished these were their approaches to social and cultural mobility. Pop theory had its roots in the 1940s and was a reaction against the incorporation of a compromised modernism within Welfare State culture. Influences from the European avant-garde lay behind both the Independent Group discussions (a group of theorists and practitioners who met at the ICA in the 1950s) and the architecture movement known as New Brutalism. Two interconnected ideas were associated with these developments: that modern life had poetic and spontaneous qualities that were being suppressed in polite and conventional forms; and the popular character of modernity (manifest in mass-consumerism) in contrast to the paternalism of orthodox modernism. Whilst Independent Group critics such as Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway expressed views that were scandalous from the perspective of Britain's design establishment, their ideas had even greater significance when used to criticise Hoggart and the New Left. It was suggested in the last chapter that the New Left was a subculture with significant connections to those groups that were emerging in the context of post-war social and cultural mobility, but that an aspect of New Left culture had its origins within the longer historical tradition of middle class dissidence. The way in which both Hoggart and the New Wave had promoted their distinctive approaches to social and cultural mobility was through the representation of space. Critics such as Reyner Banham were far more visually aware than a writer such as Hoggart and were also conscious of an avant-garde

tradition which, in the 1950s, had produced new theories of space which were critical of architectural and planning orthodoxy, which in the British context was also bound up with paternalistic forms of middle class dissent, now incorporated within the post-war settlement.

Much of Hoggart's interpretation of post-war cultural change was supported by spatial assumptions to which Pop theory developed a critical approach.

It is important to recognise that this was *British* Pop theory (not just that it was produced in Britain, but that it was applied in a British historical context). A turning point for British Pop theory was Reyner Banham's application of ideas he had developed in his doctoral thesis (a reassessment of the early modern movement) to the narrative of social mobility implicit within New Left culture, a critique which combined elements of autobiography and an historical methodology which is comparable to that found in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.⁵ Banham does this through a cultural object, the Moulton bicycle, which functions in his writing to deconstruct the prevailing image of working class culture found within Hoggart and the New Wave, and allows Banham to discuss his own working class childhood. A similar approach is taken with respect to the Beatles, who, contrary to the views of critics which prevailed in the early 1960s, are understood by Banham to represent a culture which is British *and* culturally mobile, and, in a complex sense, 'traditional'. An important element within Banham's discussion of both the Moulton and the Beatles was to question those historical narratives which promoted the idea of cultural decline as a consequence of modernisation.

What was of great significance in the application of Pop theory to Britain was its approach to the historical narrative of post-war upward mobility figured in the scholarship boy. The dominant narrative within New Left culture tended towards nostalgia and an inability to come to terms with working class culture in its contemporary forms. The Moulton bicycle was a cultural object which allowed one to question such a narrative, but it also signified something else, the culture of progressive people who would have to learn to ride with (form an

⁵ Benjamin 1999

alliance with) a working class now integrated into mechanised, urban pop culture.

Finally, Pop theory introduced the idea of consumers as experts, suggesting that they were in possession of new forms of cultural competence. This approach can be compared to Benjamin's idea of a breakdown of the division between experts and non-experts⁶ but it tended to privilege those cultural activities which seemed to challenge the passivity of mainstream and respectable culture and it was paralleled in views expressed by some within the sixties counterculture. Pop theory had made considerable advances in promoting ways of evaluating popular culture, therefore, but it also continued to draw upon notions of authenticity and passivity. Mass produced culture was not dismissed as of mind numbing banality, a view that still had considerable currency within the culture of the New Left, but those cultural forms that were given a positive evaluation by the Pop theorists were those that appeared to be disruptive of convention and to challenge, not just the orthodoxies found within more orthodox and established criticism, but also a range of mainstream and popular tastes. What was favoured by British Pop theory in the early 1960s was popular culture made strange.

British Pop Theory: Concepts and Origins

One of the conclusions of the last chapter was that whilst Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and the cinema of the British New Wave both displayed an interest in working class culture, neither represented this in its contemporary forms as anything other than despoiled, a condition understood to be a grim consequence of post-war social dislocation and restructuring. The New Wave was as dismissive of mass-produced popular culture as had been Hoggart, but in contrast to the latter it showed a positive attitude towards those alienated individuals occupying the margins of the contemporary working class community. Hoggart may have regarded the 'jukebox boy' as a terrifying example of the consequences of social modernisation, but the latter's equivalent in, for example, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in which Arthur

⁶ Benjamin 1970

Seaton is seen observing his collection of suits, had a good deal more style. When contemporary popular culture coincided with existential subversion, which was sometimes manifest in the figure of the New Wave anti-hero, it was acceptable in these films. But contemporary popular cultural forms such as television were apparently beyond the pale.

Whilst the usual reading of Hoggart focuses on his description of working class culture, it was argued, however, that an underlying theme of equal significance in *The Uses of Literacy* was its concern with the dangers faced by that individual from the working class who was to experience upward mobility – the scholarship boy. These two concerns - the purported destruction of traditional working class culture and the cultural ineptitude of those now occupying the lower reaches of the middle class - were found in Hoggart and are illustrative of an inability to deal with post-war social dislocation and cultural change in ways other than nostalgically. The figure of Ken Barlow has been mentioned already: a character out of place, unable to return to his working class roots, unable to move on, perpetually in a condition of mourning.

Such an attitude was modified in the emerging New Left. Sinfield has argued that the New Left could be considered as a subculture. An implication of such an approach is to understand it as a broad milieu and as a distinctive audience for particular cultural artefacts such as Britain's sixties New Wave cinema. New Wave cinema *had* moved on considerably from the position of Hoggart and it had begun the task of visualising space in a way that could represent the contemporary experience of social and cultural mobility. It also mourned the loss of the "dense, object invested universe" of traditional working class life, even as it represented with distaste the contemporary working class stupefied by television. But it also introduced a character strictly unthinkable in Hoggart, the hero of modern life whose marginality to this purportedly degraded culture was the condition of his nobility. This was an ambivalent position but one which will be the starting point for our discussion of subsequent developments associated with the Independent Group and participants within it such as Reyner Banham, and with the approach taken to popular culture by 'visual' as opposed to literary critics in the early sixties.

In fact the position taken by Reyner Banham was immensely more sophisticated than that which characterised New Wave cinema, whilst at the same time there were certain shared assumptions. Both were in most respects very different to Hoggart. Perhaps the best way to understand the appropriation of the popular by Banham and British Pop theory is in terms of their methodology: not that they favoured certain artefacts and not others, although they *did*, but that their method of critical and historical interpretation was crucial to the process of selection. This might be appreciated with reference to a relatively recent film, Patrick Keiller's *Robinson In Space*,⁷ which is relevant to debates about the sixties partly because of *its* underlying approach, one of rereading Britain's heritage culture through a situationist inspired *dérive*, an approach which constantly raises questions about prevailing historical readings of Britain in the sixties which are still dominated by memories of the New Wave.

Philip French, in his 1966 essay in *Sight and Sound*, commented on the typical ambivalence to mass culture found in New Wave cinema:

"In the early Sixties no British film was complete without a sequence set in a fun-fair. One might say that the fun-fair was the objective correlative of the movie-makers' attitude to the working class. It was ambivalent of course – a combination of disgust with what they took to be an impoverished mass culture (the overwhelming impression given by Lindsay Anderson's 1954 documentary *O Dreamland*) and an admiration for the uninhibited vulgarity and *joie de vivre* of the masses (in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*)."⁸

Robinson In Space can be understood as a work of historical revisionism because it constantly raises the problem of Britain's absent modernisation, a theme that takes one directly back to the 1960s. What it also offers as a potential resolution of current dilemmas (such as Britain's preoccupation with 'heritage') are selected elements from the mass-culture which so disgusted the

⁷ Keiller 1997

sixties New Wave film makers. Like Lindsay Anderson's Free Cinema documentary referred to in the previous chapter, *Robinson In Space* featured a scene in Blackpool. But whereas the former treated the working class leisure to be found there as a prurient, repellent spectacle,⁹ Keiller represented it, in one of the final moments of the film, as a kind of triumph: "Blackpool," says the narrator of the film, "holds the key to... utopia... Blackpool stands between us and revolution."¹⁰ Blackpool is, nevertheless, rendered 'strange' in this sequence: there is a montage of lingering iconic shots of the Central Pier's ferris wheel, one shot at night with its lights glowing and a similarly lit Tower in the same frame, another daylight shot with crashing waves surrounding it. The use of these long-shots is similar to the typical New Wave representation of the industrial landscape as lyrical and picturesque.¹¹ New Wave cinema was capable of finding beauty even in the despoiled urban landscape, but not in a scene of such supposedly debased working class leisure as Blackpool. The absence of a soundtrack composed of loud, strident pop music, which typically accompanies fun-fair sequences, distances the scene from the dominant modes of interpretation associated with such precursors as *O Dreamland* and *A Taste of Honey*. In many ways, the treatment given to Blackpool by Patrick Keiller is similar to the approach taken to popular culture by Reyner Banham. Banham reacted fiercely against the suggestion that popular culture was prurient or repellent, but at the same time his approach produced something which was somehow surreal and out of the ordinary.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s some critics and practitioners whose professional interest was visual rather than literary (architects, artists, art and design historians) produced a set of critical ideas and participated in a debate which was far more sophisticated and sensitive towards the changes referred to above than those, such as Hoggart, whose origins were in literature and who were at the forefront of the development of cultural studies. The Independent Group (IG) met at the ICA in the 1950s and the significance of their discussions is that they have been subsequently regarded as initiating a debate around

⁸ French 1966 p110

⁹ Hill 1986 pp151-53

¹⁰ Keiller 1997

popular culture, taking a less judgemental more analytical and more accepting approach to it than was typical in that period in Britain. But it would not be correct to imagine that participants in the IG, whose general approach was in sympathy with popular culture, were uncritical. Whilst sympathetic to the popular they also had a selective attitude towards the latter, favouring particular forms of popular culture but not others. The term Pop is sometimes used as if it were the same as popular, and in the writing of a critic such as Reyner Banham it does refer to far more than art, being a category much more applicable to the domain of the everyday, but it was always, nevertheless, a concept associated with avant-garde ideas. The concept of consumer choice might now be regarded as a factor in the evaluation of a cultural artefact but not all choices were considered acceptable. As Whitely argued, when discussing the ways in which Reyner Banham and his IG colleagues had regarded the popular: "Picasso is fine and so are comic books, but in between is the unspeakable middlebrow."¹²

In her book, *The Independent Group*, Anne Massey suggested that one reason why the IG has not had its cultural analyses sufficiently recognised had been because "The foundations of Cultural Studies were essentially literary rather than visual."¹³ IG participants had emerged from a different tradition to that of Raymond Williams or Richard Hoggart, both working class individuals who were, nevertheless, able to establish themselves within university literature departments. The young artists and architects who adopted critical positions in fifties and sixties Britain, some of whom were also from working class backgrounds, were from a different critical tradition. They had a visual rather than a literary orientation and, furthermore, they had partial roots within the European avant garde.

In Britain the roots of Pop can be traced back to the 1940s when, to the dismay of radical modernists, the architectural establishment had in general abandoned its earlier principles in favour of a compromise between modernist orthodoxy

¹¹ "that long shot of our town from that hill" See Higson 1996 p134

¹² Alloway 1957 p29, cited by Whiteley 2002 p103

¹³ Massey 1995 p128

and a sentimental, vernacular Englishness. Charles Jencks discussed post-war developments such as the New Towns and the Festival of Britain as both characterised by picturesque tendencies. Post-war housing was rich in “People’s Detailing” which “became mandatory at the LCC in the early fifties: pitched roofs, bricky materials, ticky-tacky, cute lattice-work, little nooks and crannies, picturesque profiles all snuggled within a cardboard-like rectitude.”¹⁴ Jencks’ language does not suggest the critic who is sympathetic to the meanings and values symbolised in such examples of popular taste and nor was this the case with some of the exponents of an alternative practice in the 1950s, as the example of New Brutalism illustrates.

The Smithsons, who pioneered New Brutalism, considered their architecture to be popular, in that they thought it related to the way working class people actually lived in 1950s Britain, rather than the way in which the architectural establishment believed that they lived, arguing that: “Brutalism tries to face up to a mass production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces at work.”¹⁵ Picturesque and period style detail, the symbolism of a sentimentalised Englishness, was to be replaced by a rougher look wherein aesthetic beauty would be found in the qualities of the materials and mass production methods employed in construction. And there was a distinctly utopian ring to the Smithson’s declaration that

“...we wish to see towns and buildings which do not make us feel ashamed, ashamed that we cannot realise the potential of the twentieth century, ashamed that philosophers and physicists must think us fools, and painters think us irrelevant. We live in moron-made cities. Our generation must try and produce evidence that men are at work.”¹⁶

One of the sources of this type of approach to popular culture was associated with modernism’s avant-garde wing and can be traced back to the early 20th century when artists such as Picasso had embraced the ‘other’ in their struggle

¹⁴ Jencks 1968/69 p51

¹⁵ Alison and Peter Smithson 1957 p113, quoted in Whiteley 2002 p117

¹⁶ Alison and Peter Smithson 1973 p2, quoted in Whiteley 2002 p123

with academicism. Later, Surrealism also had an attitude towards the popular, embracing what were regarded as its spontaneous and primordial aspects. Reyner Banham had once championed New Brutalism and he had first used the term *Une Architecture Autre*, in an *Architectural Review* essay of 1955, to define this movement.¹⁷ The emphasis in this concept was on an anti-classical rawness which might be associated with the theories of pre-war Surrealism, and, Whiteley has suggested, Jean Dubuffet's 'raw art.' According to Whiteley, Dubuffet characterised the latter as

"untainted by polite conventions of civilised refinement..... nothing to do with taste, classical harmony, or skill, but an innermost and primordial impulse that existed in everyone and that should be communicated directly and spontaneously."¹⁸

Banham also had close contact with Eduardo Paolozzi, the British representative of *Art Autre*, who had lived in Paris in the late 1940s and who had become familiar there with various exponents of anti-art such as Tristan Tzara and Dubuffet himself.¹⁹ Also influential was the 1953 exhibition, *Parallel of Life and Art*, which was discussed by Banham in his *New Brutalism....*, published in 1966.²⁰ Banham wrote that the exhibition had challenged "humanistic conventions of beauty in order to emphasise violence, distortion, obscurity and a certain amount of 'humeur noir'... [it] was a subversive innovation whose importance was not missed"²¹

The IG was favourable to the avant-garde and dissenting wing of the modern movement, therefore, but these positions were also mobilised to sanction new forms of consumerism. There was, for example, a definite bias towards a certain type of popular culture. Not lame, suburban, vernacular Englishness (the "unspeakable middlebrow"²²) but bright, sharp and slick popular products with American origins and associations. It was a defence of consumerism, but

¹⁷ Banham 1955d

¹⁸ Whiteley 2002 p119

¹⁹ Whiteley 2002 p122

²⁰ Banham 1966

²¹ Banham 1966 p62, cited by Whiteley 2002 p122

a more complex one than is suggested by Massey, who argued that the IG “proposed a positive analysis of mass culture from within – as knowing consumers who found pleasure in going to the cinema.”²³ One of Massey’s claims in her book is that the IG became mythologised in the 1960s. Whereas Banham, Alloway, Paolozzi and other participants in the IG were largely interested in popular design culture, by the early sixties their role, she argues, was being rewritten, sometimes with their collusion, as that of the forerunners of Pop Art, the avant-garde faction within the fine arts. A useful illustration of this tendency cited by Massey was Ken Russell’s *Pop Goes the Easel*, shown by the BBC as part of the Monitor series on 25th March, 1962.²⁴ According to Dick Hebdige, this film had “helped to establish the stereotype of the young, iconoclastic and highly-sexed male pop artist whose ‘lifestyle’... was conspicuously in the Swinging London mode.”²⁵ The audience, it would seem, perceived these artists in such a way and had negative attitudes towards them as a consequence. A BBC audience research survey revealed that “a large proportion of the sample audience deplored this investigation into what they supposed is the beatnik level of the world of art.”²⁶

Alloway’s mid 1950s defence of science fiction is the clearest evidence of IG attitudes towards popular culture. Lawrence Alloway, discussing his role in the IG discussions, some ten years following the events, stated that: “we felt none of the dislike of commercial cultural standards [found] amongst most intellectuals, but accepted it as fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically.”²⁷ In a sense this was true, but what Alloway consumed with enthusiasm was a specific type of popular culture the characteristics of which were demonstrated in his *Ark* article published in 1956. What inspired Alloway with respect to science fiction cover art was its Surrealist aspect, wherein the “bug eyed monster” was placed alongside of a female, “half-undraped or wearing a transparent space suit.”²⁸ This theme of beauty and the beast which

²² Alloway 1957 p29, cited by Whiteley 2002 p103

²³ Massey 1995 p128

²⁴ Massey 1995 p113

²⁵ Hebdige 1988 p121

²⁶ Cited by Massey 1995 p113

²⁷ Lawrence Alloway from Lippard 1966 p31-32, cited by Whiteley 2002 p91

²⁸ Alloway 1956 p19

the Surrealists had admired in the film *King Kong* was also supplemented by fetishistic dress which, Alloway suggested, provided an outlet for “erotic art in our half-censored urban culture.” Another theme was technology and Alloway compared contemporary popular culture’s representation of this to the early avant-garde: “the futurists, dadaists, and purists” had “symbolised aspects of the machine and industrial life” but popular artists producing illustrations for mass circulation science fiction magazines had now made a major contribution to the iconography of the 20th century, argued Alloway.²⁹

There were differences in the way that technology had been represented in the ‘machine aesthetic’ of the 1910s and 1920s, and its contemporary representation in mass-produced science fiction. Reyner Banham’s defence of New Brutalism had been partially founded upon his doctoral thesis and saw early exposure in his *Architectural Review* essay, ‘The Machine Aesthetic,’ published in April 1955.³⁰ The thrust of the essay was to challenge some of the cherished ideas that had become associated with the modern movement, ideas claiming that good design conformed to abstract and universal principles and that the application of these principles always resulted in simple, geometric outcomes. Banham regarded the adoption of the Machine Aesthetic by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier as an understandable mistake when machine production seemed, in the early decades of the 20th century, to produce simple, classical forms that were comparable to the great architecture of earlier ages. In Le Corbusier’s book, *Towards a New Architecture*, for example, vehicles of the 1920s are compared to the Parthenon, suggesting that the same aesthetic governed both the greatest of architecture and standardised machine production. Banham suspects, nevertheless, a certain disingenuousness on Le Corbusier’s part, because the motor cars chosen as his principal examples are expensive, handmade one-offs, not the mass-produced Model T Ford. So, Banham contended, the early modern movement’s proclamation that good design, whether of buildings or motor vehicles, could be produced and judged according to aesthetic principles that were virtually laws of nature, was false.

²⁹ Alloway 1956 p19

Modernism had sought to make its position unassailable by claiming for itself machine production, arguing that in the standardised product were revealed those pure geometric forms that had occurred throughout history. Banham argued that architects had in actuality chosen only those machine products the forms of which could be invested with classical ideas. There were hymns in praise of the 'engineer' but 'he' was invested with all the attributes of "the Gothic Craftsman and the Noble Savage, suggesting that 'engineers [were] healthy, virile, active and useful, moral and happy.' "³¹ Furthermore, this was a misunderstanding of the character of standardisation which if rectified would have radical implications:

"In engineering, a standardised product is essentially a norm, stabilised only for a moment, the very opposite of an ideal because it is a compromise between possible production and possible further development into a new and more desirable norm. This double expendability, which involves not only the object itself but also the norm or type to which it belongs, is actually what excludes mass-produced goods from the categories of Platonic philosophy."³²

For Reyner Banham machines meant mass-production and a mass-consumer market. The modernist defence of the Machine Aesthetic was founded on Rationalist principles and suggested that the production of useful artefacts would always tend towards a certain economy and inherent purity of form. Banham argued that actually in mass-production the requirement for utility "in the Rationalist sense" was marginal. Far more important than utility as a determinant of form in the mass-production environment were the demands of the market, which Banham seems to regard as a mechanism whereby the manufacturer could ascertain the wants of the consumer:

"When the American Ford Motor Company issued a questionnaire to discover what qualities buyers sought in cars, most answerers headed their lists with such utilitarian considerations as road-holding and fuel consumption – a result

³⁰ Banham 1981b

³¹ Banham 1981b p44

which sales analysis did not support – but when asked what *other people* looked for most headed their lists with chromium plate, colour-schemes and so forth.”³³

The motor car was the primary example of a design form the characteristics of which were determined by the desires of its consumers, not by universal principles that might equally be applicable to a hand made craft object, or to the greatest achievements of classical architecture, was Banham’s claim.

The challenge to modernist orthodoxy, and the implications of such a challenge for architecture and urban planning in particular, had been the concern also of European avant-garde theory which provides a useful point of comparison to Banham and Alloway. In *The Production of Space* which was published in the early seventies but which was the culmination of theoretical work carried out in the fifties and sixties, Henri Lefebvre drew a distinction between those ways in which spatiality was mapped, which he called *representations of space*, and the places and spaces of everyday life which he called *spaces of representation*.³⁴ In the latter, space is lived, embodied and experienced in ways that exceed the limits imposed by architects, urban planners, novelists and film-makers. Lefebvre’s work has been read as an assertion of the body against the “realm of visibility,”³⁵ if the latter is taken to mean the ordering of concrete space according to an abstract vision within which corporeal senses such as smell, touch and hearing are subdued. Lefebvre suggests that alternative modes of spatiality are more akin to pathways, meeting places and passageways, transitional and ephemeral spaces rather than the fixed and functional spaces of the planner. Lefebvre’s ideas about spatiality are useful as a critical approach to modernist orthodoxies in architecture and urban planning but also when considering emerging ideas about popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s. New ways of thinking about popular culture which were closely connected to a widespread transformation in space were to emerge in the

³² Banham 1981c p90 This article was written in 1955 and originally published in *Industrial Design*, under the title ‘Industrial Design and Popular Art,’ in 1960

³³ Banham 1981b p45

³⁴ Lefebvre 1991 pp362-3 discussed in Swiss *et al* 1998

³⁵ Swiss *et al* 1998 p8

course of the 1960s as established definitions of space, within which architecture and modernist urban planning had once been hegemonic, were superseded. Against “the Four Functions of the city as defined by Le Corbusier in 1933: living, working, traffic and recreation” there was now promoted a “new urbanism,”³⁶ within which social space would be recovered - through notions of the ephemeral, the transitional and, most scandalous from the viewpoint of design orthodoxy, expendability - for the purposes of pleasure.

The types of critique offered by Lefebvre, Constant Nieuwenhuys (known as ‘Constant’), Asgar Jorn and others within the European avant-garde had the consequence of making architecture strange. In Britain, as elsewhere, architecture was hegemonic in design theory, determining the type of evaluative criteria that could be legitimately applied to the whole range of designed artefacts. Pop theory in mid-fifties Britain was an assault on the hegemony of a modernist orthodoxy with architecture at its centre - even when the discussion was concerned with something as apparently trivial as pulp science fiction - because it began to introduce the concept of expendability. In Alloway’s discussion of the way in which the popular arts represented technology it is not that the latter were an expression of timeless aesthetic virtues, rather that the modernity of contemporary life took a technological form which science fiction, with its “quick rate of consumption,”³⁷ could visualise. The most significant iconic images for Alloway were not the ‘pure’ forms that might have been chosen by Le Corbusier but small visual elements drawn from the field of cybernetics: “the keyboard, the punched card or tape, and the illuminated panels – all with characteristically repetitive small forms.”³⁸ That Alloway discussed cybernetics is interesting because in the 1950s and 1960s the term had a utopian significance, seeming to promise a technological solution to the problem of entrenched, traditional, institutionalised authority. It was closely allied to Britain’s modernisation project, although not in its later Wilsonian form but more closely akin to the emerging counterculture. The coming of cybernetics would not involve the triumph of the machine aesthetic but the

³⁶ Nieuwenhuys 1967 p55-61

³⁷ Alloway 1956 p23

³⁸ Alloway 1956 p23

creation of a pervasive network, into which everyone would be plugged and which would satisfy the myriad and diversity of social desires.

One did not necessarily need a revolution in artificial intelligence, however, to find examples of how the principles of cybernetics might function. Reyner Banham published an essay entitled 'Vehicles of Desire' in *Art* in September 1955 in which he discussed those determinants of form that differentiated various orders of artefact. What distinguished architecture from vehicle design, argued Banham, was partly size and permanence, partly a predisposition on the part of architects to symbolise in their work enduring human values. Banham's underlying concept in 'Vehicles of Desire' was 'expendability.' The qualities that an expendable artefact needed were not those that would endure because a Cadillac, like last month's pop hit, was not going to be around as long as the Parthenon and should therefore have: "finish, fantasy, punch, professionalism, swagger.... no fussing after big, timeless virtues...."³⁹

Banham's positive analysis of Detroit car styling was partly based on a "two aesthetics"⁴⁰ approach in which different categories of cultural object would be judged against different evaluative criteria, and his defence of consumer goods production was complex. The justification and rationale were partly to be found within a long-standing dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of orthodox modernism and its capacity to theorise the character of machine production. Whilst the proposition that certain types of consumer good – such as the products of the Ford Motor Company – took the form they did as a consequence of consumer desire appears naïve, it is clear that a concept such as expendability also had its origins within avant-garde critical approaches to modern life. A positive evaluation of expendability could be allied to an avant-garde critical position, even whilst it appeared to regard consumer markets as adequate facilitators of choice and therefore democratic in character. Whilst these propositions are certainly located within a broadly European debate about modernism they were also expressed in a more specifically British context, however. To advocate 'expendability', the 'throw-away aesthetic' and consumer

³⁹ Banham 1955c p3, quoted in Whiteley p92

choice was clearly provocative - "We live in a throw-away economy, a culture in which the most fundamental classification of our ideas and worldly possessions is in terms of their relative expendability"⁴¹ - and did constitute an offence to the values of Britain's design establishment.

By the end of the 1950s the challenge to modernist orthodoxy in the writing of British Pop theorists became closely linked to a critique of that broader historical narrative which had suggested a correlation between popular design culture and the dislocation of the traditional working class community. At this point Reyner Banham's writing started to take the form of a critique of Hoggart, and what he considered to be an orthodox left position accounting for Britain's supposed cultural malaise. Banham also introduced an autobiographical element into his writing.

In Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* he had observed the world of industrial objects as fossils, as traces of a living history from which historical meaning could be read.⁴² The dialectical image provided a means of comprehending history as non-linear and contradictory. Banham's approach can be understood as similar to Benjamin's historical methodology in that he analysed particular designed objects as both contemporary artefacts and as constituting an historical moment within which the past and present were contained in a dialectical tension. Whereas Richard Hoggart's view of contemporary culture was one which regarded the present as lacking in contrast to the past, the foundation of such a situation being the presumption of historical decline, Banham presented a dialectic of historically situated cultural forms with their own contradictory histories. For Hoggart, historical transformation was strictly linear with the degraded present remorselessly superseding the past. Reversing Hoggart's approach Banham looked for traces of the progressive present in the past by retro-activating the concept of Pop, by investing in it an historical significance. The 1950s and early 1960s were then reconfigured in

⁴⁰ Banham's statement of this was made in 1955, cited by Whiteley 2002 pp163-164

⁴¹ Banham 1981c p90

⁴² Benjamin 1999; Buck-Morss 1990 pp58-77

Reyner Banham's writing as the realisation of the popular democratic potential of an earlier period, not its collapse as Hoggart seemed to suggest.

Banham began to take this approach as early as 1960 when he first wrote about the Moulton bicycle in an essay continuing to discuss the critical ideas first explored in his doctoral thesis. Whilst the essay was in part a defence of a redefined modernism it was also the beginning of a critique of the culture of the New Left, or at least that aspect of New Left culture which was preoccupied with contemporary decline as a consequence of social and cultural change. And part of that sense of the contemporary degradation of culture was linked to disquiet with new forms of mobility: social, cultural, but also physical. Hence the significance to Banham of new modes of transport. Banham argued that:

"If we didn't live in a little England entirely surrounded by Eng. Lit. and terrorised by the humane – studies Cosa Nostra, Alex Moulton's mini-bike would surely be recognised as a minor cultural revolution, and Moulton himself would have been the subject of a *Monitor* Special long ago."⁴³

Banham's initial interest in the Moulton was that it challenged precisely those notions about design which maintained that: "the centuries have given a final shape, perfect beyond improvement, to certain basic tools such as the hammer and the oar, that generations of trial and error have produced working forms almost indistinguishable from Platonic absolutes."⁴⁴ The Moulton challenged such a notion because it was a radical re-design of an artefact that had purportedly achieved its ultimate form. On the other hand, the essay combined this critical view of orthodoxy in design with some observations about class in Britain. An ingenious technical specification - the polythene ring on the chain wheel which was designed to keep clothing free from oil - constituted for Banham "a minor cultural revolution.. and thus liberates the rider from that badge of social shame: trouser clips."⁴⁵

⁴³ Banham 1981d p119. Originally published in the *New Statesman* October 20th 1960

⁴⁴ Banham 1981d p119

⁴⁵ Banham 1981d p120

An underlying assumption in Banham's essays on the Moulton was that cycling was not just a practice associated with working class life but was also a signifier of certain ideas concerning class and its locations, found within New Left culture. The bicycle was associated with the early 20th century socialist movement in Britain, notably through the Clarion Cycling Club which had been founded in 1894 in order to "combine the pleasures of cycling with the propaganda of Socialism."⁴⁶ In the 1930s there were large numbers of working class people involved in cycling as a leisure pursuit but the activity could never be quite detached from its associations with middle class dissent, and has to be contrasted with radical attitudes towards other forms of working class leisure such as holidaying in Blackpool.⁴⁷ The bicycle was also a significant mode of transport until the 1960s when there was a huge increase in motor car ownership.⁴⁸ Certain (topographically flat) towns and cities were historically dominated by the cycle, such as Hull and Banham's home town of Norwich. But the cycle also represented a particular attitude to class which was associated with the New Left intelligentsia, as the opening scene of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* indicates, as does the following incident related by Banham:

"Members of the outgoing big-wheel culture clearly recognise the Moulton as a threat of some sort: the first real hairy-knee'd cyclist to see me on mine promptly reacted with a tremendous virility bit, standing up in his toe clips, thrashing the pedals up and down with his calf muscles coming out like reef-knots and the frame of the bike whipping this way and that as he smoked off along the North Carriage Drive. Happy days, mate. Remember me to David Storey!"⁴⁹

Banham regarded the Moulton as signifying a new type of urban middle class rider but also the disappearance of the proletarian cyclist: "there are no bikes in *Coronation Street* and only two in Z Cars."⁵⁰ In effect the Moulton is employed in this essay to indicate the collapse, not of traditional working class culture, but

⁴⁶ Pye n/d

⁴⁷ Cross 1993; Cross 1990

⁴⁸ Research has indicated that between 1920 and 1960 about 20% of journeys to work (for males) was by bicycle, and 10% of journeys to work for females. Source Pooley 2003 p88

⁴⁹ Banham 1981d p120

of a particular view of the working class which was represented in, for example, British New Wave cinema. Banham was attempting a critique of the New Left intelligentsia's appropriation of working class culture, via Richard Hoggart and David Storey.

Pop, Space and Mobility

In the early sixties the New left's view of working class culture also began to disintegrate with respect to film. Franco Moretti has written that:

“for every genre comes a moment when its inner form can no longer represent the most significant aspects of contemporary reality, ... at which point, either the genre betrays its form in the name of reality, thereby disintegrating, or it betrays reality in the name of form, becoming, in Shklovsky's words, a ‘dull epigone.’”⁵¹

Moretti was writing about the 19th century English novel's relationship to the real spaces it attempted to recreate imaginatively. By the early 1960s social dislocation was, for a significant minority (those whose fate Hoggart found it impossible to imagine as anything other than traumatic) experienced spatially. In the early films of the New Wave one of the main dilemmas faced by the protagonist was his marginality to the culture which contained him, but that culture was still represented as authentic in comparison to new popular cultural forms. But perhaps the film *Billy Liar* might be considered to have reached the tolerance limit of its genre, as this almost contemporary discussion by Philip French in *Sight and Sound* suggested:

“In retrospect the highpoint of the picture is that nouvelle-vagueish promenade through the Northern high street by Julie Christie as Liz, harbinger of short skirts, discotheques, op art, the pill and what you will. (one almost expected to see Arthur Seaton, bearded and carrying a scythe, disappear over the nearest slagheap). And when Liz caught the midnight train to London at the end, the camera may have remained to follow Billy on his lonely, elegiac return to the

⁵⁰ Banham 1981d p120

family semi-detached, but spiritually the film-makers had a one-way ticket to ride south with Miss Christie.”⁵²

Whilst Philip French had a low opinion of both the kitchen sink realism *and* the London centred films which followed, he did not make the error of regarding the former as more real than the latter. The change in the subject matter of British cinema and the shift of location to London has been of interest to some film historians who have taken a different opinion. Jeffrey Richards is disdainful of the London-centred films of the sixties in comparison to the sober realism of their immediate predecessors:

“The Swinging London era of cinema had been mainly London-centred, male-centred, style-centred, fatally self-indulgent. The issues of class, race, region and gender had taken second place to the exaltation of a classless consumerist self.”⁵³

Richards’ assessment presumed a *dislocation* of space, as the action moved from the contained spaces of the Northern working class community and: “sober realism and earnest social comment gave way to fantasy.. the grim north to the glittering metropolis... plain truthful settings to flamboyant unrealistic decorativeness.”⁵⁴

Richards recommends John Hill’s *Sex, Class and Realism* as one of “the best analyses of the British New Wave”⁵⁵ but pays no regard to Hill’s analysis. A view of working class culture as inextricably linked to the type of landscape which contained it was prevalent in both Hoggart and the New Wave, but, as the last chapter demonstrated, this was a view predicated on a particular spectator position. Realism was not necessarily concerned with telling the truth, in other words, but was part of an aesthetic associated with New Left culture.

⁵¹ Moretti 2004 p102

⁵² French 1966

⁵³ Richards 1992 p233

⁵⁴ Richards 1992 p228

⁵⁵ Richards 1992 p235

From the viewpoint of such an aesthetic the assumption has been that films set in London during the sixties were less real than those filmed in the north of England. Richards assumed that one dealt with authentic experience in a sober and realistic fashion, and that the other was largely concerned with self-indulgent fantasy of an ephemeral nature, and that this was more generally indicative of the problematic nature of the era itself. But what if the spatiality of the swinging London film was more 'real', rather than less so, in comparison to the gritty aesthetic of the New Wave?

In an essay written by Moya Luckett, it is argued that the Swinging London films derive their greater purchase on reality precisely because of their representation of space as mobile and culturally diverse, "in contrast to the landscape of the New Wave, which testifies to (masculine) stasis and confinement."⁵⁶ Luckett cites an essay by Alan Lovell in support of this claim. Lovell argued that many of the films made in Britain subsequent to the New Wave were influenced by either Brecht or Surrealism and aimed to be realistic without being naturalistic. These films could claim to be realistic but not through a "description of the surfaces of life."⁵⁷ Luckett's argument concerning mobility suggests a remapping of the cultural geography of sixties Britain as the North-South divide gives way to a London centred national imaginary.

Culture and class had been mediated in Hoggart and in the New Wave film through a representation of space as relatively static, the turmoil of dislocation in the latter occurring in the inner-life of the principal characters rather than across space. The disintegration of the kitchen sink film in the early sixties might be understood as the genre betraying its form in the name of reality. But how might new forms of spatiality be represented?

In many ways the principal assault on the spaces of traditional culture in Britain was considered to emanate from America. Banham's revisionism had to deal with the widespread hostility to 'Americanisation' within the design establishment and the New Left in general. Underlying Hoggart's account of

⁵⁶ Luckett 2000 p234

traditional working class culture was also the notion that the newer cultural forms were corrosive of traditional culture and had their origins in the USA. The foundation of this antagonism towards American produced or inspired mass-culture was partly the assumption that it was an interruption of sensitive, local cultural traditions, partly that it was associated with US foreign policy and the politics of the Cold War. Banham was aware of the charge of colluding with the enemy:

“Around 1946-47 when the lines were being drawn for the Cold War, suddenly there came a moment when it was very difficult to read *Time* or any American magazine at all, simply because of one’s political loyalties. In that period there arose a situation where one’s natural leanings in the world of entertainment, and so on, were to the States, but one’s political philosophy seemed to require one to turn one’s back to the States. I remember the curiously divided mind in which one listened to pop records on Radio Luxembourg in the evenings and wondered just whose side you were on.”⁵⁸

More broadly, American inspired popular culture was also disparaged on the left because it was regarded as affirmative rather than critical of current values. Banham wrote that “We dig Pop which is acceptance-culture, capitalistic,”⁵⁹ and John McHale, who had worked in the advertising industry, remarked that “if we go on voting Labour like this we shall destroy our own livelihood.”⁶⁰

Whilst charges of collusion were taken seriously the most damaging attack on Pop culture was the notion that it was alien to sensitive cultural traditions which were now becoming irrecoverable. Hoggart’s traditional working class community was stable with clear boundaries and for those who dared to violate these there were serious consequences. It had been marked not just by *social* but also *geographical* immobility, a condition, however, which was uncharacteristic of many actual locations where working class culture had developed. Seaports were amongst these latter types of places with their

⁵⁷ Lovell 1996 p201

⁵⁸ Banham 1981a p85

⁵⁹ Banham 1981a p85

unstable workforces, fluid and ethnically mixed populations and networks of physical and cultural communication with the rest of the world. It was no accident, therefore, that pop music as the most significant sixties development in Pop culture, with its close connections to American musical forms, should have taken shape in Liverpool. If Americanised design had been one of the major thorns in the side of the cultural establishment in Britain in the fifties, by the sixties pop and youth culture were the most serious of enemies, and in the early sixties this meant the Beatles, or as Banham referred to it, “the Beatle phenomenon.”⁶¹ A correspondent writing in the *New Statesman* argued that in contrast to the ‘old days’ at the Cavern in Liverpool: “when the best traditional jazz bands in the land played at the club, and when old men of thirty would come and sit and listen to a music that was relatively adult and civilised, [what] there is now is a kind of hell.”⁶²

The accusation against pop is a familiar one but the writer made another claim regarding the “Mersey Sound”: that “this ‘sound’ owes nothing musically to Liverpool. It echoes American rhythms rather than songs like ‘Walking by the Liverpool Strand’ or ‘Nelly Gray.’”⁶³ Once again there is a retrospective regard for music hall songs as authentic - these would have been severely criticised by 19th century cultural critics for their commercialism - but for Banham, the main problem in this approach was its assertion that there was nothing distinctively British about the Beatles. The *New Statesman* article quoted made the familiar comparison between contemporary pop and trad jazz, regarding the two as entirely disconnected, yet, Banham maintained:

“If the Beatles owe anything musically to Liverpool it is precisely to trad jazz. Liverpool is the Nashville of Great Britain... The beat has been growing in Liverpool since even before the war. Trad jazz there has a very long history that goes back to the days when trad jazz was alive, before it became a sort of Gaitskellite affectation of the Labour middle.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Cited in Banham 1981a p85

⁶¹ Banham 1981a p85

⁶² John Morgan *New Statesman*, cited in Banham 1981a p85

⁶³ John Morgan *New Statesman*, cited in Banham 1981a p85

⁶⁴ Banham 1981a p85-86

The tendency to sanitise trad jazz, to regard it as balanced and civilised even though protest music, was challenged in Banham's account by activating the concept of Pop retrospectively, by suggesting that there were continuities between the present and the past, and that Pop was a concept which could reveal these:

"When you have a town where men have been blowing as good as they used to blow in Liverpool, and beating things, and indeed using electric amplifiers on their guitars, then the Beatles derive from something which is real – there is a long tradition there of making, roughly speaking, this kind of noise."⁶⁵

The concept of the 'real' is not insignificant here, because in the historical context in which it was used the implication was of 'authenticity', signifying to contemporary audiences not just truthfulness but a revelation about the lives of a, usually excluded, social group, something which it was believed folk culture could do. The Beatles played music which the majority on the progressive left regarded as the antithesis of the folk tradition. Banham suggested otherwise by recuperating the concept of realism and simultaneously placing the Beatles in a long historical tradition, arguing that "Liverpool has been for years the town with the wildest Pop culture in England."⁶⁶ Pop was a way in which one could recuperate the thirties for the progressive culture of the present, by refusing the cycle of degradation and decline which was implicit within a Hoggartian approach, and this also gave the present its authenticity.

The thrust of the above was to recuperate the Beatles by placing them within a long historical tradition which the concept of Pop could effectively describe. Reyner Banham's critical reading of contemporary culture also involved an interesting autobiographical element. Banham was to dispute the historical validity of Hoggart's views, partly by appropriating his autobiographical method in order to challenge his conclusions. This retro-activation of Pop was not a

⁶⁵ Banham 1981a p86

⁶⁶ Banham 1981a p86

procedure favoured by everyone. In *Bomb Culture* Jeff Nuttall described how, in the forties:

“Popular culture was not ours. It was the province of the young adult, contrived and modified by the promoters and impresarios and aimed at the mid-twenties age group. In particular it was aimed at the working class, for this was the heyday of the vast popular dance-halls, the Mecca and Locarno; popular culture was utterly separate from highbrow culture; the avant-garde was part of highbrow culture and both were posh”⁶⁷

The implication of Nuttall’s statement is that popular culture would, in the course of the fifties and early sixties, become *ours*, us being “the Underground, the artists and alienated thinkers..”⁶⁸ in contrast to the “squares... the mums and dads who pretend the future is secure..”⁶⁹

But in contrast to Jeff Nuttall, Banham was inclined to describe his childhood in the thirties in terms of his “Pop origins,”⁷⁰ by which he meant a background within which: “the live culture, the culture in which we were involved” consisted of American comics and publications such as *Mechanix Illustrated*, cinema and speedway, rather than “capital C culture...which really meant nothing to any of us” and which was rather lame, the local Philharmonic Society being unable to “even play Beethoven right.”⁷¹

There was a point to this. Banham’s objective was not simply to argue that the contemporary working–class did not conform to Hoggart’s characterisation of it, but that the underlying historical narrative, which counterposed the traditional to the contemporary (and in which the latter was found to be lacking) was also misleading. He was to argue that there was, furthermore, something profoundly mistaken in the tendency to separate Pop culture from other more socially

⁶⁷ Nuttall 1970 p21

⁶⁸ Nuttall 1970 p238

⁶⁹ Nuttall 1970 p238

⁷⁰ Banham 1981a p88

⁷¹ Banham 1981a p84

acceptable cultural forms. Banham and his IG colleagues had all experienced both and for practical purposes they were inseparable:

“The key figures of the IG – Lawrence Alloway, John McHale, Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, Frank Cordell, even myself – were all brought up in the Pop belt somewhere. American films and magazines were the only live culture we knew as kids – I have a crystal clear memory of myself, age sixteen, reading a copy of *Fantastic Stories* while waiting to go on in the school play, which was Fielding’s *Tom Thumb the Great*, and deriving equal relish from the *recherché* literature I should be shortly performing, and the equally far out pulp in my hand. We returned to Pop in the early fifties like Behans going to Dublin or Thomases to Llaregub, back to our native literature, our native arts.”⁷²

Whiteley has challenged the connection made by Banham between the IG’s enthusiasm for Pop and their supposed working class backgrounds. In the 1979 documentary *Fathers of Pop* Banham had described the IG as socially “a rough lot”, but Whiteley argues that they were a socially mixed group, some of whom came from relatively privileged backgrounds.⁷³ Whilst Whiteley is correct with respect to some members of the IG – although Banham was not one of these - it is important to recognise the objectives in the Atavism essay, which were to use Pop as a way of questioning dominant narratives of social mobility. Hoggart was concerned with the consequences of social and cultural change for the working class but was also unable to contemplate the possibility of a worthwhile and dignified life for members of that class now uprooted from their community and unhappily situated on the margins of middle class culture. In the films of the New Wave by contrast the condition of marginality whilst desperate was also the occasion for an introspection that carried with it a kind of nobility, but even here there were few options for such an individual other than to leave a community which had been corrupted by the trivial blandishments of mass-consumerism.

⁷² Banham 1981e p96

⁷³ Whiteley 2002 p93

If one objective of the Atavism essay was to rescue the working class from the abominations of the English folk tradition, another was to recuperate the scholarship boy from the unhappy fate assigned to him by Richard Hoggart, and Banham did this through a single image first employed in his 1960 essay. The Moulton was a bicycle associated with a new type of urban middle class rider, but seemingly one who was burdened with the memory of his working class origins, represented by the indignities of the trouser clip. The Moulton had provided a technical solution to this residual memory and symbolised a decisive break with the representation of the proletarian cyclist within New Left culture. In 1964 Banham returned to the theme of the bicycle and its rather uneasy position within contemporary culture. Banham had been accused of “atavism” by a colleague when seen riding his bike, and this led him to recall his wife’s reaction to his description of himself as a scholarship boy, as both “atavism and (apparently) showing off.”⁷⁴ Banham felt it necessary to do something which was strictly unthinkable in Hoggart, however, which was both to acknowledge his working class origins and at the same time to feel at ease with his current position, which in a peculiar way the Moulton allowed him to do:

“[it would have to be] a really weird bike, much weirder than the mini, before you come on a situation where you can’t just sit on it and peddle off. And similar reflexes work also at the cultural level, for other things that take you back to where you came in.”⁷⁵

The essay was addressed directly to those like himself, “who have come up the educational ladder hand over hand”⁷⁶ but who were unable to recognise the contemporary reality that “the working class don’t ride bicycles any more. Radicals like me ride bicycles, and the working class have got Populars and Cortinas and Minis.”⁷⁷ The Moulton provided a powerful image because it captured and then destabilised and interrupted the prevailing tendency in New Left culture which was to represent the working class as both traditional and sullied; dignified when imagined in the context of historically superseded forms

⁷⁴ Banham 1981a p84

⁷⁵ Banham 1981a p84

⁷⁶ Banham 1981a p88

of labour and culture but corrupted in the actual present. As an alternative to the New Left's "real hairy-knee'd cyclist " Banham introduces an image of the working class made strange in the form of the Cortina driver and now in possession of a range of sophisticated cultural competencies.

Consumerism and Cultural Competence

Banham's preoccupation with consumer markets as facilitators of choice looked dangerously close to an apology for capitalism. For modernist critics of consumer led design the symbolic low point had been reached in 1949 with the transposition of the Lockheed Lightning tailfin to the rear bumper of the Cadillac range, the removal of an element from its original context of production and its insertion into one of what were now a potentially infinite variety of new contexts.⁷⁸ Much of Banham's writing in the 1950s was a cheerful defence of this type of innovation which he considered to represent the breakdown of a hierarchy within which consumers were patronised by a design establishment elite.

The idea, however, that associated with consumerism were new and developing forms of cultural competence is very significant. The assumption was that the new forms of contemporary popular culture were indicative of new sensibilities amongst consumers who now demanded a product which was brash and sophisticated: "contemporary popular culture, which is a function of an industrialised society, is distinguished from other folk art by its refusal to be shabby or second rate in appearance, by a refusal to know its place,"⁷⁹ argued Banham. Banham considered this to be a significant change in the character of cultural consumers:

"But at least they begin to know what they're looking at and can put a name to it, which is a very considerable improvement on the condition of mass taste even twenty years ago. And for this one has television to thank. We are faced with the unprecedented situation of the mass distribution of sophistication. It

⁷⁷ Banham 1981a p88

⁷⁸ Although this did create much excitement in the 1940s it was also a restatement of the pre-war controversy concerning streamlining. See Hebdige 1988 p65

may not be profound art appreciation, it may not be profound learning in music, but it is an ability to discriminate. To know whether music is with it or whether it's old and square, to recognise something as being keenly styled, to be able to distinguish a mod from a rocker – this introduces a degree of popular sophistication which is a genuine cultural innovation, and we really don't know a damned thing about it yet.”⁸⁰

One might see the notion of cultural competence advocated by Banham as parallel to the positive evaluation of mechanical reproduction found in Walter Benjamin's work. In contrast to Adorno who deplored the increased presence of commodity production within the cultural sphere, Benjamin was optimistic about the subversion of traditional high, bourgeois culture which now made art available for popular politics. The uniqueness of the art object and the aura surrounding it had been dissolved, and in the case of new media such as film and photography the social implications were not primarily associated with greater access, but with the breakdown of the division between experts and non-experts. Benjamin argued that in the case of the cinema, everyone was now an expert. And although the debate between Adorno and Benjamin hinged on the status of the artist and the critical role of art – “Adorno argued that [mechanical reproduction] robbed the work of art of its socially critical dimension, Benjamin argued that it enabled art to enter the arena of popular politics”⁸¹ – modernist design theory had appropriated similar ideas to those expressed by Adorno, and it is a response to these that is the context of Banham's work.

The work that preoccupied Banham in the late fifties and early sixties was popular design in the form of Pop, but such an interest did not exclude the broader urban environment, architecture, planning and innovative forms of urban rapid transit. The early modernism which Banham had most admired had been Futurism, a movement with a particular interest in the potential of the city, and in the mid-sixties Banham would champion the utopian architectural ideas

⁷⁹ Banham 1981c p92

⁸⁰ Banham 1981a p88

⁸¹ Open University 1982 p78

associated with Archigram. It is interesting, though, that there are continuities between the modes of consumerist expertise suggested above, and the broader urban context. Urban living itself had been discussed as a skill. In response to the Buchanan Report⁸² on traffic in cities, Banham had discussed urban rapid transit possibilities for the future, one of which was the travelator. The problem with such a mechanism which was, essentially, a “conveyor belt for people” was that if it were to serve the high density city in the way that the early 20th century visionaries such as Sant’ Elia had hoped, as a high-speed moving pavement which passengers could step on and off of at any point, then the hazards would be considerable. Banham suggested that:

“Perhaps the real solution to all these problems would be to make travelator-manship a prime urban skill, as in Isaac Asimov’s celebrated vision of a car-free metropolis..., [in his] novel *The Caves of Steel*. There the speed-differential between the fast travelator and the static ground is smudged by a series of parallel sub-travelators at ever decreasing speeds toward the outside, and nimble citizens skip from strip to strip until they reach the express belts in the centre”⁸³

A view of city life which is reminiscent of Sant’ Elia’s statement that “In the mechanised city one must circulate or perish.”⁸⁴

Some evidence for the development of skilled forms of consumerism in an urban context in the sixties is provided in Hebdige’s seminal discussion of subcultures. ‘The Meaning of Mod’ is Hebdige’s account of the mods and is emphatic that the consumption of commodities was an active process amongst this group, requiring a great deal of skill and involving first the appropriation of a commodity such as the motor scooter, then its redefinition in terms of “its use and value and finally [the reallocation] of its meaning within a totally different context. This pattern... amounted to the semantic rearrangement of those

⁸² Buchanan 1963

⁸³ Banham 1964 pp103-05

⁸⁴ Quoted in Banham 1955a

components of the objective world which the mod style required.”⁸⁵ Hebdige also noted the difference between this style of consumption and the far more passive style practiced within, generally middle class, hippie culture:

“At the coast the mods were impatiently reacting *against* the passivity of the crowd; each mod was a creative subject capable of entertaining an unimaginative adult audience arrogantly displaying the badge of his identity to a nation of featureless picture-watchers. The hippie’s festivals, on the other hand, deliberately avoided contact with cultures,... were conducted in remote locations in a complacent atmosphere of mutual self-congratulation, and centred round the passive consumption of music produced by an elite of untouchable superstars.”⁸⁶

But the evidence used to support the idea of consumption as active and skilful was generally drawn from the practices of subcultural groups, or implied a cultural practice which was far from the mainstream. Banham maintained that “all consumers are experts, have backstage knowledge of something or other, be it the record charts or the correct valve timing for doing the ton,”⁸⁷ but these were cultural skills generally associated with youth culture or practices on the margins of respectable working class life. Consider Jeff Nuttall’s discussion of the expertise exhibited by the ‘ton-up boy’ in his autobiographical account of the sixties counterculture, in which he compares the English biker with his rather more violent American counterpart:

“In England the pivotal skill was not brutality or dancing but simply fast and dangerous driving. In the early sixties every London hospital was crowded to overflowing with motorcycle casualties. The main rendezvous were the Ace and the Busy Bee, two sprawling seedy petrol-station cafés near the London terminus of the M1. In the tangled mess of the road systems, the jungle of glittering signs, the endless hypnotic cat’s eyes, the monotonous lanes of traffic, the desolate motorway cafeterias, the rockers were a strange and heartening

⁸⁵ Hebdige 1975 p93

⁸⁶ Hebdige 1975 p95

⁸⁷ Banham 1981e p96

breath of wildness and preserved integrity. They would come roaring down to London at the week-end in tribes, studs glittering, tangled greasy hair flying out behind them.”⁸⁸

Nuttall’s perception of the rocker is of an urban cowboy, a romantic figure who had managed to carve out an authentic space within modern life, but he was contrasted very sharply, and rather cruelly, with the mediocre mass who had not acquired such an expertise for authentic living:

“There was something satisfying about the way in which a traffic stream on a hot Saturday, stalled, crammed with sweaty pink families trapped with one another as the Mini-Minor was trapped in the queue, could be utterly negated, cancelled by a column of gleaming rockers hurtling past them to the round-about.”⁸⁹

Whilst Benjamin had considered the artistic forms he advocated as progressive, popular and democratic they were, in the practical circumstances of their application in the 1930s, disruptive of conventional attitudes and expectations. Benjamin had supported Brecht’s experimental theatre in which the spectator was to be wrenched from a condition of passive consumption through a variety of alienating techniques. This was not necessarily a comfortable experience for the audience.

If Hoggart’s vision of the working class community within which marginality was strictly forbidden is unsatisfactory, might there not be a tendency in subsequent ideas about working class life to only celebrate cultural dissent?

Permissiveness in architecture might be a case in point. Banham’s discussion of expendability noted that whilst the consumer goods industries managed to satisfy the rapidly changing needs and desires of people, architects, even when they had the technical means at their disposal to allow for the expression of choice by the consumer, could not bring themselves to do so. The architect was unable to function in a Pop culture environment in which decision-making

⁸⁸ Nuttall 1970 p32-33

about aspects of a building's design would be devolved downwards. And this had consequences for the appearance of the building:

"As far back as the apparently permissive aesthetics of the Tecton schemes for Finsbury, where you have a big façade full of little windows, and each window a carefully framed working class still-life with Nottingham lace curtains and a plaster dog and a pot plant, the whole proposition *still called for a carefully framed* working class still life. It kept such firm quotation marks round the inhabitants that they were not deciding the aesthetic of their own dwelling or anything of the sort, the big frame dominated and the working class inhabitant was simply allowed to peep out through carefully-framed holes on every floor."⁹⁰

Perhaps this was an exercise in "...good design as a form of aesthetic charity done on the labouring poor from a great height", which Banham considered to be "incompatible with democracy,"⁹¹ but one wonders if the pot plant in the window might not just have been an expression of the taste of the inhabitants.

We might finally consider a different interpretation of the transformed spatial environment and the social groups deployed across it. Dick Hebdige wrote about the mod's adoption of:

"a sharp but neat and visually understated style...., partly explained by his desire to do justice to the mysterious complexity of the metropolis in his personal demeanour, to draw himself closer to the negro whose metabolism seemed to have grown into, and kept pace with that of the city."⁹²

Similar to the view taken by Banham, the mod in Hebdige's account also constituted a particular approach to working class culture, one within which there was an emphasis on those currents which challenged the mainstream. But Hebdige's study of the mod did two other things, firstly to identify a subculture which both challenged the dominant culture and somehow remained

⁸⁹ Nuttall 1970 p33

⁹⁰ Banham 1981a p87

⁹¹ Banham 1981f p120. First published in the *New Statesman* 1960

firmly inside of it and which was thus quite distinct from the counterculture. The mod cannot be mistaken for a scholarship boy. Secondly, Hebdige gives a very vivid sense of physical space within which the mod functioned, a city from which the mod's exquisite lifestyle could not be detached.

Conclusion

In *Literature, politics and Society in Post-war Britain*, Alan Sinfield suggested that during the 1950s and 1960s: "[the] New Left were mainly middle class dissidents, but reluctant to identify themselves as such." Sinfield went on to argue that "Middle class dissidence has to recognise its own traditions, concerns and modes of operation, not to imagine itself as universal or as a misplaced version of someone else's politics and culture."⁹³

Some of the manifestations of this fatal misrecognition were *The Uses of Literacy* and the British New Wave, accounts of working class culture produced from the perspective of those now inhabiting another class who were, nevertheless, loath to recognise this fact. One of the achievements of British Pop theory was that it challenged the veracity of these representations of working class culture but also offered to those whose social position was more complex than could be represented through a nostalgia for one's origins, a more plausible view of their own history. Banham's approach to post-war history was similar to Hoggart's in this respect, in that whilst both offered lengthy considerations on the character and history of the working class in Britain, both were primarily addressing the upwardly mobile. One of the objectives of the 'Atavism...' ⁹⁴ essay is, for example, to provide this group, not just with a more accurate view of contemporary working class culture but also a more credible view of *themselves*. For those occupying the lower reaches of the progressive middle class the notion of the 'scholarship boy' was a problem which Banham's essay attempted to disarticulate.

⁹² Hebdige 1975 p89

⁹³ Sinfield 1989 p274

⁹⁴ Banham 1981a

It was through a bold move, the retrospective activation of the concept of Pop, that Banham was most successful in reconfiguring his own history and that of the social type known as the 'scholarship boy'. Pop was given a long and distinguished history by finding the origins of the Beatles in the wild musical scene of 1930s Liverpool, whilst his own Pop origins were affirmed through the dialectical image of the Moulton bicycle. These were both forms of revisionism which depended on a reordering of physical space, challenging the rigidities of Hoggart's traditional working class habitus, a move which invested historical significance in the contemporary experience of physical and social dislocation.

This positive recognition of spatial dislocation was bound-up with the attitude of the British Pop theorists to popular culture. I have argued that Reyner Banham's approach to popular culture was not uncritical and accepting but flowed from a primarily avant-garde critique of the modernist tradition, part of a long tradition going back to the beginning of the 20th century wherein avant-garde and popular cultures had a symbiotic relationship, the former selectively engaging with the latter.⁹⁵ This is the context within which one must understand the enthusiasm shown by Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway for consumerism and the application of the principle of expendability to mass-produced design: not as naivety in the face of corporate capitalism but as an engagement with everyday life, in the sense that this term was used by Lefebvre, and a critical attitude towards paternalistic and sometimes puritanical versions of social democracy. The concept of expendability could in this sense appear as a means of challenging the rigid allocation of space associated with post-war planning regimes.

One of the most interesting ways in which Banham engaged with consumerism was to regard it as engendering new forms of cultural competence, an approach which has some affinities with the insights offered by Benjamin in the Artwork essay. Benjamin considered that one positive aspect of the destruction of the uniqueness of the work of art – its aura – was the consequent breakdown of a rigid separation between artist and audience, expert and non-expert. What

⁹⁵ Huyssen 1988

Banham defined as the “mass distribution of sophistication” would no longer be serious art appreciation but it was the widespread availability of basic cultural knowledge and competence. Such ideas were also associated with the popular sixties notion of cybernetics, which was less to do with a technological hardware that hardly existed than with the perception that cultural management could be more democratic and dialogical if a framework existed within which individuals could express and exercise their choices and desires.

Banham and British Pop theory did constitute a rupture with the representations of class found in Hoggart and the New Wave, and the former did have a far more sophisticated approach to the relationship of popular culture to class in the late fifties and sixties. Banham and Alloway were selective, nevertheless, in their acceptance of popular culture, a selectivity which was a product of their critical methodology. More significantly, the use of critical methods associated with Surrealism, Lefebvre and Benjamin⁹⁶ were a means of using popular culture, particularly through the concept of Pop, to reinterpret post-war history and to challenge those dominant interpretations associated with the New Left.

Space and attitudes towards spatial dislocation have been a significant theme in this chapter. The way in which British Pop theory was able to deal with the relationship between social class and space historically was one of its achievements. The next chapter will continue the theme of space and the 1960s more broadly by exploring questions around the cultural geography of Britain and the notion of a North-South divide.

⁹⁶ Although rarely referred to explicitly by Banham, Benjamin's approach does, nevertheless, provide a useful way of reading the former.

Chapter Four

Contested Geographies: Landscapes of Proximity and Mobility

“One of the tribulations that every visitor to the English North must suffer is a desperate shortage of decent inns. A few are scattered here and there about the countryside, but in the towns there are probably not half a dozen hotels between Stoke and Tynemouth that a man could recommend with a clear conscience to his friends.”¹

“The ‘North’ of England is not a precisely defined and mapped out jurisdiction with clear borders.”²

“To drive up M1 is to feel as if the England of one’s childhood...is no more.”³

“It is finally a matter of defining landscape in a way that includes both the mobility of the vernacular and the political infrastructure of a stable social order.”⁴

Introduction

This chapter further explores the culture of the sixties New Left, in terms of contested landscapes and geography. As Chapter Two indicated, both Hoggart and the British New Wave had views concerning social and cultural change which were registered in a spatial form. Chapter Three suggested that Pop theory had a significant spatial dimension. The aim here is to consider further a diverse range of responses from within a broadly defined New Left to social and cultural change, which were spatial in character.

¹ Un-named newspaper cited in Moorhouse 1964 p22. Moorhouse provided evidence from the *Good Food Guide* challenging the accuracy of the figures

² Shields 1991 p207

³ Tony Brooks *The Observer* November 8th 1959 p5, cited in Merriman 2003 p126

The chapter begins with a consideration of the negative attitude towards the suburb, which was typical of Britain's intelligentsia, and which therefore also characterised much of the New Left. Such a position, however, ignored, or was ignorant of, the realities of 20th century urban Britain in which suburban living was pervasive. This hostility to the suburb was significant in the sixties because it had been the consequence in an earlier period of new modes of mechanised transport. With the diffusion of the motor car in the 1960s, the suburban form also became more diffuse and new forms of decentralised living space emerged. There was a tension within the New Left between a hostility to decentralisation, found within New Wave cinema and some television (such as *Coronation Street*) and more positive responses to the benefits of mechanised transport and the breakdown of physical isolation. Nevertheless, as a dominant narrative within British culture, the hostility to decentralised living was pervasive so it is significant that there was a modernising literature (some of which was left-wing whilst much was not) which favoured new forms of decentralised space dependent on a modern communications infrastructure. The tension between these two positions is defined here in terms of the competing landscapes of proximity and mobility.

One form in which this tension was expressed was through a contested cultural geography. The cultural division of Britain into North and South had a long history and one element within it was the notion of the North as industrial,⁵ working class in character and composed of closely bound communities (landscapes of proximity). This was challenged within the modernising literature in two ways: as the consequence of misguided policies which required modification; and as the product of a faulty geography which needed to be reconstructed. In the former case, some modernising arguments took the enclosed and isolated communities of the North as fact and argued that these needed to be incorporated into the affluent society. In the latter case some modernisers also pointed to the social and cultural diversity of the nation, which a cultural geography dividing North from South grossly simplified and distorted.

⁴ Jackson 1984 p326

What is interesting with respect to the principal case study drawn from the modernising literature (Moorhouse's *The Other England*⁶) is that it found some of its ideas concerning a revised cultural geography in Pop culture. It will be recalled from previous chapters that the appropriation of popular culture by the Pop theorists, as well as by prominent New Left modernisers such as Stuart Hall, was selective. Whilst Moorhouse demonstrated a rather naïve enthusiasm for the modernity of Birmingham his most enthusiastic description of a city was of Liverpool, the modernity of which was not to be found in its obviously decaying infrastructure but in its mobile, migrant and Atlantic based culture which provided it with a great (although frequently brutal) vitality. In its assessment of the benefits of modernisation, prevailing and distorted views of the North –South divide were repudiated, therefore, but in his favouring of disreputable Liverpool over respectable Manchester, Moorhouse's account drew upon ideas about the authenticity and vitality of working class culture, encountered within New Wave film.

This chapter should suggest that cultural responses to modernisation in Britain very much centred around space, both in terms of the immediate landscapes of mobility or proximity and in terms of the broader national geography. Some tendencies within the New Left did favour the idealised landscape of an enclosed community, but there is considerable evidence of enthusiasm for the modernisation of space and amongst some critics within the New Left as well as within wider intellectual currents.

Suburbia

At the beginning of the sixties it is possible to see the extent to which the suburb was almost universally despised, but particularly amongst the intelligentsia and the left-liberal, dissenting middle class. The recent publication of Philip Larkin's early poems provides a telling insight into a typical left-liberal attitude towards the suburb in the early post-war period (at a time when Larkin would have

⁵ Although there were also representations of the rural North. See Adams 1982 pp13-17

regarded himself as left-wing). In a poem called *Behind the Façade*, the 17 year old Larkin wrote the memorable lines “Let him rend suburbia apart with a blow from his bronzed hand / And lead our ranks away from cheap radiograms.”⁷ We don’t know exactly who the young Larkin had in mind when he wrote these lines but the connection of suburbia with an apparently inferior and tasteless mass-produced consumer good was not an original one. The suburb was often identified with the type of consumer goods scorned by the intelligentsia and was frequently envisioned in terms of kitsch and tastelessness, but it was, nevertheless, a consequence of an industrialised society within which a spatial division had occurred between work and residence. And, furthermore, it was far more generalised than intellectuals were prepared to admit. According to Peter Hall, most British towns in the 1960s owed “their essential form to the period 1890 to 1930” and might be defined as “centralised public transport cities.”⁸ In the 19th century there had been the classic home-work relationship within which most workers lived within a few minutes walking distance of their workplace, and for some this was still the case, argued Hall, but the more general experience in the 1960s was one of commuting from home to work. It might be argued, therefore, that if this latter relationship between home and work determined the existence of the suburb, then most people (intellectuals included) lived in them. The typical residential experience in the 20th century was the suburb, made possible by the invention and dissemination of mechanised transport.

Nevertheless, suburbia was generally represented as a desperately grim existence. This was a theme in the New Wave films of the late fifties and early sixties, films which had a particular significance for the New Left and the left-liberal intelligentsia. In *A Kind of Loving*, Vic’s mother-in-law represents the essence of the dismal middlebrow culture which post-war intellectuals feared and associated with television, but which also took tangible form in particular types of residential space. As the film draws to a close and Vic attempts to regenerate his broken marriage, he expresses the worry to his father that Ingrid

⁶ Moorhouse 1964

⁷ Blake Morrison’s review of Philip Larkin *Early Poems and Juvenilia* AT Tolley (Ed) 2005 in *The Guardian* 26th March, 2005

might want “a semi, like her mother’s” and is told that “she’ll live where she’s bloody well put.”⁹ The film has made us detest Ingrid’s mother and her suburban pretensions, against which this reassertion of working class patriarchy feels a relief. But we must place this juxtaposition of traditional working class culture and its values against the dangers of upward mobility and affluence, in the context of other factors shaping the film.

Billy Liar is interesting because it juxtaposes the awful tedium of suburbia, not with a vitalistic working class culture (this is now treated somewhat ironically) but with the vibrancy of swinging London and the promise of sexual freedom embodied in the character of Liz. Both *Billy Liar* and *A Kind of Loving* configure suburban space as the location of a wearisome and potentially dangerous middlebrow culture to which something romantic and dangerous in a different way is an antidote. Whatever their claims to realism, these films are shaped by a worldview for which the distinction between authentic working class culture (or an authentic counter-culture) and recent, mass-produced cultural forms was essential.

Such representations of suburbia were not confined to kitchen sink realism, however, and in fact had broad significance within British culture. In the 1960 British film *The Rebel*, Tony Hancock plays a suburban clerk whose daily life was one of mind-numbing repetition but who dreamt of becoming a bohemian artist. The film’s main target was the preposterous nature of modern art, but, nevertheless, it picked up on an established narrative within British culture, representing suburbia as tedium and conformity, against which bohemian Paris was an exciting if imaginary alternative.¹⁰

These three films do not simply rage against the suburb but contrast it with other, more desirable and more authentic residential arrangements. But these are more than places in which people live; they represent the spatialisation of antithetical cultural forms which are then invested with either moral values or

⁸ Hall 1967 p639

⁹ Cited by Medhurst 1997p251

¹⁰ Medhurst 1997 p250

moral worthlessness. In *The Rebel* and *Billy Liar* the antithesis of the despised suburb was bohemia, either in Paris or swinging London; in *A kind of Loving* the suburb's antithesis was working class culture and its traditional residential forms. Both of these were, somehow, invested with the characteristics of authenticity.

Nor were references to suburbia absent from other cultural forms in the 1960s. Such has been the argument of Simon Frith and others about pop culture's British origins, a viewpoint which also offers the possibility of thinking about suburbia as both real space and a dystopian cultural fantasy inhabiting the minds of some of its residents. If there is evident in Tony Hancock's *The Rebel* and in the New Wave films a tendency to spatialise purportedly antithetical cultural forms, this is even more marked in pop and rock culture. The cinema New Wave proclaimed itself as realist and as a significant achievement in the representation of an authentic working class culture. It was argued earlier that the New Wave might be understood in terms of the worldview of its principal audience, the New Left intelligentsia and the recipients of post-war social and cultural mobility, groups for whom the representation of working class culture as vital and authentic in contrast to the blandness of the middlebrow had some appeal. Similarly for pop music, as Jon Savage argued, "pop (and rock's) rhetoric is of the inner city, but scratch the surface of most English pop stars, and you'll find a suburban boy or girl, noses pressed against the window, dreaming of escape, of transformation."¹¹ And not just aspiring pop stars but also their typical audience whose negotiation of their own identities was a complex transaction between metropolitan fantasies and the realities of suburban life. Suburbia was generally imagined, argues Frith, as "an empty sign,"¹² as a lack of things, as the (non) place from which people travel in order to reach places of more substance and cultural plenitude. For many pop musicians in Britain in the sixties, such as Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, their suburban origins were simply absent from their music as they adopted the vocal patterns and themes associated with the inner city. Others referenced suburbia, such as The Beatles' evocation of "blue suburban skies" in Penny

¹¹ Jon Savage 'Suede' *Mojo* 3 January/February 1994, cited by Frith 1997 p271

Lane, but Medhurst is unsure if this is a rare celebration of the suburb or whether it should be read, as Ian MacDonald argues, as “subversively hallucinatory ...[d]espite its seeming innocence.”¹³

Of course there is no artistic requirement that pop musicians should incorporate their social and spatial origins into their music, but that the metropolitan ‘other’¹⁴ was consistently adopted suggests that the absent suburb was lurking somewhere within the music and the proclaimed identity of the musician. The metropolis and suburb are interdependent elements within such a narrative and both functioned as myths in sixties culture, later to be revived in seventies punk, a form of music with deep suburban roots. In the case of the latter the art colleges circling London provided important locations where the narrative of suburb and metropolis was negotiated. The way that the suburb was imagined might have been a fantasy but the spatial relationship between the city and its suburban hinterland had some interesting consequences for sixties culture.

‘Swinging London’ was the outcome of a number of events, including changes to the city’s international position, the decline in manufacturing jobs and in the city’s population and the parallel growth of a vibrant service economy and the suburban periphery.¹⁵ Frith argues that the Flamingo club, one of the legendary spaces of London’s sixties pop culture, was actually the location for “the suburbanisation of the city, as local obsessions and alliances were mapped on to Soho streets and basement dance floors.”¹⁶ And for many others living in provincial locations, swinging London was a powerful and immensely attractive myth – one need only, once again, consider *Billy Liar* – but it is not always recognised that the city was also myth for those, such as the mods who attended gigs at the Flamingo, who lived within its orbit and were given regulated and measured access to its cultural spaces.

¹² Frith 1997 p275

¹³ Medhurst 1997 p264; MacDonald 1994 p179

¹⁴ For a discussion of the concept of the ‘other’ see Said 1979

¹⁵ See ‘Swinging London, Dangling Economy: 1945-75’ in Porter 1994

¹⁶ Frith 1997 p272

It is evident, then, that suburbia was a significant space in sixties Britain, in the sense that it was in this type of space than many people lived, but also as a cultural fantasy which functioned as the antithesis of, equally mythological, authentic spaces. Was it possible that the experience of suburbia was far more of a positive experience for its inhabitants than modernist inclined intellectuals would admit? Gary Cross has argued that the democratic aspects of suburbanisation have mostly been ignored in the largely critical literature, suburbs being equated in such accounts with bourgeois individualism and aspirations to wealth and status. Cross maintains that the suburb represented a quest for spatial and temporal freedom, spaces free from market obligations.¹⁷ Whilst accounts have concentrated on the bourgeois origins of the suburb, stressing that the motive underlying their formation was to escape from plebeian disorder, Cross points out that in the 20th century, labour movements have fought for a reduced working week precisely in order to gain time that could be experienced at a distance from the workplace, both in terms of the enjoyment of dedicated blocks of time such as weekends and holidays, and in terms of the necessary travelling time from home to work.¹⁸ Despite accounts to the contrary, it may be that suburban living was an aspiration, not of deviant members of the working class who had succumbed to bourgeois ideology, but compatible with broad labour movement demands.

George Orwell's views are symptomatic of the liberal left of the inter-war period and expressed a hostile, misogynist and misanthropic attitude towards the imagined horrors of lower middle class respectability, in his novel *Coming Up For Air*, dismissing the suburb as "a line of semi-detached torture chambers where the poor little five to ten pounders quake and quiver, every one of them with the boss twisting his tail and the wife riding him like a nightmare and the kids sucking his blood like leeches."¹⁹ Admittedly this is the voice of one of Orwell's characters, but the attitude is consistent with his opinions expressed elsewhere, as well as in keeping with his own experience.

¹⁷ Cross 1997 p108

¹⁸ Cross 1997 pp1122-115

¹⁹ George Orwell *Coming Up For Air* 1950 p12, cited by Cross 1997 p111

Decentralisation, the Motorway Network and Megalopolis

Suburbia was a form of residential space but it was clearly dependent upon a considerable infrastructure of services, those facilitating individual mobility such as roads and railways being the most significant. Whilst in the Victorian period and even during the 1930s, suburbs were rather close to the cities that spawned them, extending as far as the tram line or railway,²⁰ by the sixties the spread of motor car ownership and the building of motorways meant that the essential characteristics of the suburb could extend over much greater distances, and the decentralisation of space made these less and less dependent on the cities they might once have been associated with, leading to the creation of a megalopolis. The term 'megalopolis' had been applied to England by Geographer Peter Hall in a study published in 1973,²¹ and was first employed in an account of the USA's North-Eastern Seaboard published in the early sixties.²² This latter book argued that America's North East was an area possessing a unique set of interconnections and modes of communication, shared by a vast population across a huge space. For the theorists of the English megalopolis, the area designated was the core of England, stretching from the South Coast to Preston in the North West and York in the North East.²³

Peter Hall argued that Megalopolis England had become fact during the sixties, although the post-war planning regime had done its best to contain the process. Hall argued that a degree of functional urbanisation was extensive, but with the absence of an accompanying physical urbanisation. In much of England, argued Hall, TV meant that the country and the town no longer constituted unique and distinct cultures, the populace of both sharing similar cultural points of reference. Country roads also functioned as urban roads, getting congested by daily commuter traffic, which suggested that the functional distinctions between town and country had, to a degree, already broken down. But the degree of physical urbanisation of these rural areas had hardly taken place at all with country towns and villages still harnessed to the architectural forms of a society once dominated by agriculture. So, in some respects, megalopolis

²⁰ 'The City of By-Pass Variegated' in Hall 1988 pp47-85

²¹ Hall 1973

²² Gottmann 1960

England had become a reality in the sixties because the functional distinctions between town and rural areas had been eroded; but, according to Hall, strict planning regulations determined that the physical manifestations of these changes were very limited.

In 1964 Moorhouse had already identified such tendencies in the London region when he noted that the area “extending south to the coast in Sussex and Kent, north to Luton, east across all Essex to the northern lip of the Thames estuary, west as far as Haslemere and Reading,” differed from the rest of the country primarily because every community within it was dependent on the capital, for work, shopping, and entertainment.²⁴ Such dependencies were reliant on extensive transport networks and whilst the South East possessed a highly developed rail system, road transport was increasingly a significant factor in the facilitation of individual mobility.

In the early sixties such developments took on a popular form as the opening of the M1 motorway had an impact on national geography. On November 2nd, 1959 the London to Birmingham section of the M1 was officially opened by the Minister for Transport, Ernest Marple, who described it as a "magnificent motorway opening up a new era in road travel, in-keeping with the new, exciting, scientific age in which we live."²⁵ It was a relatively humble beginning, 72 miles in length, which meant that Britain now possessed 95 miles of motorway, in total.²⁶ The M1 was first experienced as cultural modernity and was associated with precisely the kind of American inspired spaces of consumption criticised by Hoggart. The following is from an article written for *The Observer* by Grand Prix racing driver Tony Brooks which appeared in the week following the opening of the motorway:

“To drive up M1 is to feel as if the England of one’s childhood ... is no more. This broad six-lane through-way, divorced from the countryside, divorced from

²³ Hall 1973 p57

²⁴ Moorhouse 1964 p19

²⁵ Ernest Marple, 2nd November 1959, cited at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/northamptonshire/asop/northampton/m1.shtml> (07,05,04)

towns and villages, kills the image of a tight little island full of hamlets and lanes and pubs. More than anything – more than Espresso bars, jeans, rock ‘n’ roll, the smell of French cigarettes on the underground, white lipstick – it is of the twentieth century. For all that, it is very welcome.²⁷

The development of infrastructure was closely related to less prosaic aspects of cultural modernity in this article: what was tantamount to a celebration of placelessness was associated with the smell of *Gauloise*.²⁸ In the first few weeks after its opening, drivers queued-up in order simply to consume it as an experience and London Transport organised special bus trips to the motorway.²⁹ But this mode of reception for the motorway differed from that intended by the government’s Advisory Committee on the Landscape Treatment of Trunk Roads, which believed that the M1 should merge seamlessly with the existing landscape and provide drivers with new experiences of the countryside.³⁰ The planting of indigenous species of flowers and shrubs along embankments was seen as a means of fusing the motorway with the surrounding countryside and, as Sylvia Crowe argued:

“just as the functional engineering of the road can produce its own landscape, indicative of speed, so can the functional use of planting produce the link between the landscape of speed and the landscape of nature.”³¹

This approach to motorway landscapes had much in common with the ‘planner-preservationist’ strategy which typified inter-war debates about the relationship between town and country.³² Such compromises with the original landscape were clearly lost on those who participated in London Transport excursions to the motorway in its early days, and with those who associated the experience with coffee bars and rock ‘n’ roll music. By 1965, with the completion of the

²⁶ Charlesworth 1984; The M1 was a key element in the post-war government’s roads programme announced in May, 1946

²⁷ Tony Brooks *The Observer* November 8th 1959 p5, cited in Merriman 2003 p126

²⁸ It is interesting that the culture of modernity is signified here by both American and European elements which can be compared to the Mod appropriation of Italian style. See Hebdige 1988

²⁹ Merriman 2003 p127

³⁰ Merriman 2003 p118-119.

³¹ Crowe 1960 p95

³² See Matless 1998

M1, road transport had dramatically altered the landscape, diminishing travelling times and facilitating a new level of cultural diffusion. When the British rock and roll act, Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, had toured Britain in the early sixties, prior to the motorway's completion, the journey up to Liverpool for a gig was described by them as a challenging experience, the motorway out of London only extending to the "Blue Boar" café outside of Birmingham – a legendary stop-over for touring pop groups - after which was the inadequate and severely strained road network, and what one of the group's roadies described as "bandit country."³³

The diffusion of the motorised transport network had an evident impact on national space during the 1960s, therefore, increasing accessibility and also having cultural consequences, contributing to a growing sense of modernity. But enthusiasm for modernity was not universal and one of the ways in which anxieties about modernisation were expressed was through contested geographies and landscapes. Whilst the suburb was one such space within which such anxieties became manifest, another was the cultural division of the nation and in particular the meaning of the North of England and its familiar landscapes. In the 1967 film *Charlie Bubbles*, directed by Albert Finney and written by Shelagh Delauney (two figures with their own histories bound up in earlier representations of the North) a knowing glance was cast back towards the early sixties New Wave and in it the M1 played a significant minor role. Returning to the northern city of his birth, left after achieving fame and fortune as a writer of, we presume, social realist novels (a copy of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* appears briefly in the film) Charlie, played by Albert Finney, stops at the M1's Newport Pagnell service station, a location which appears surreal, ultra-modern and alienating. The North in which he eventually arrives is utterly transformed – gleaming high towers in the city centre are contrasted with demolished terraces dispossessed of all activities except for a brass band, an enduring symbol of northern working class culture, marching across a devastated landscape.

³³ *Jukebox Heroes: Johnny Kidd and the Pirates* BBC1, 13 August, 2001

Suburbia was juxtaposed in such films as *A Kind of Loving* to more authentic residential space and such places were frequently located in the North of England. Some years before *Charlie Bubbles* was released the Granada TV series *Coronation Street* had provided a visual representation of the type of landscape envisioned by Hoggart. The landscapes found in this TV series, in Hoggart and in the New Wave films were all invested with characteristics marking them as radically different from the landscapes of mobility associated with the suburb. Shields uses Mary Douglas's "distinction of social arrangements by grid (based on status, wealth, etc) and group (based on locality, interest, etc)" to suggest that in *Coronation Street* "there is a generalised absence of grid distinctions such as socio-economic class in favour of group affinities based on...proximity."³⁴ The landscape of proximity was a bounded space governed by group affinities within a tightly knit locality. Shields claim is that within the space of *Coronation Street* the experience of proximity was substituted for affinities and distinctions based on class relations.

Landscapes of Proximity and Mobility

The emphasis on landscapes of proximity that was evident in these sixties representations of working class culture had its equivalent in other accounts of the landscape. *Coronation Street* may have been located in an obviously urban setting and it may have had associations with both Hoggart's representation of the urban working class and with the cinema of northern, working class realism, but its notion of community drew upon other, pastoral representations of landscape. *Coronation Street* did not evoke rural life but its representation of a simple, idealised community was a familiar one, most frequently applied to the English countryside under threat from the forces of modernisation.

Hoskins was not interested in the urban community but in his book, *The Making of the English Landscape*, published in 1955, what were essentially suburban forms were unfavourably contrasted to untouched rural England in what was a deeply pessimistic view of space transformations. Everything after 1914 is a disaster: country houses decay and are either demolished or are transformed

³⁴ Shields 1991 pp224-225

into facilities to house departments of the civil service; ancient East Anglian hedgerows are bulldozed to make way for the new, 10,000 acre business farms; over “poor devastated Lincolnshire and Suffolk ... drones, day after day, the obscene shape of the atom bomber, laying a trail like a filthy slug upon Constable’s and Gainsborough’s sky”; and everywhere are the “nissen hut, the pre-fab ... and the arterial by-pass, treeless and stinking of diesel oil.” This is a sour view which Hoskins contrasts to “the gentle unravished English landscape”³⁵ visible from the window of his Oxfordshire study.

Hoskins’ cultural geography might be comparable to that found in a book significant for Britain’s sixties alternative culture, J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, first published in 1954.³⁶ David Glover has commented on the transformation of the Shire at the end of *Lord of the Rings* as an observation on the “horrors of industrial desecration – the fouling of streams, the removal of trees, the monstrosities of modern architecture.”³⁷ But, as with many anti-industrial utopias, the horrors of the modern landscape are also made to represent the brutalisation of the people and “their subordination to an external principle of organisation in which new laws are promulgated and enforced and power centralised.”³⁸ This sounds objectionable but it is language that is comparable to that used to attack the young welfare state in the fifties³⁹ and reminds one of Hoskins’ “black hatted” bureaucrats who, like a pestilence, have swarmed into the country homes of the disestablished aristocracy, imposing their order on the populace, leaving only a few spaces which have survived the imposition of a malignant external order.⁴⁰

Hoskins based his defence of rural landscape upon a positive attitude towards the vernacular. The idea of the vernacular suggests a culture of everyday life in contrast to elite culture or, more specifically, an indigenous building style using local materials and traditional methods of construction and ornament, distinguishable from academic or elite styles. This is a superficially attractive

³⁵ Hoskins 1992 p238

³⁶ The final two volumes were published in 1955

³⁷ Glover 1984 p206

³⁸ Glover 1984 p206

³⁹ See ‘Brideshead Relocated’ in Wright 1991

idea which seems to favour popular cultural forms in contrast to an elite culture imposed from without. Nevertheless, the popular culture which is favoured has little connection with contemporary realities, pointing instead towards a mythical folk culture located firmly within the past, as illustrated by the type of folk myth in which the New Left also indulged. Driver's early sixties study of CND discusses how on early Aldermaston marches:

"the thousands winding their way through the English countryside in the springtime evoked such vital national myths as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. One CNDer described the march as 'a civilising mission, a march away from fear towards normality, towards human standards, towards the real people in the nursery rhyme whose houses are over the hill but not so far away that we will not get there by candlelight, whose hands are set to the plough and the making of things.'"⁴¹

The ideas of Hoskins suggested a stark antithesis between a vernacular landscape rooted in tradition and a modernised landscape imposed from without, and this was a view which the New Left sometimes shared. Such anxieties about the landscape, however, were not uncontested. A criticism of such an approach was made by Christopher Taylor, the editor of later editions of Hoskins' book, who commented that

"if aesthetic pleasure is separated from objective study then the most dreadful landscapes can come alive after close research and bring with them their own form of satisfaction."⁴²

An hostility to modernisation, based largely in aesthetic principles, and which lacked consideration for the advances in living standards that might arise from it was confronted by Raymond Williams in his 1958 essay, 'Culture is Ordinary.' One of the themes in Williams' essay was a critique of Leavis, whose thesis on the problem with English culture had parallels with certain aspects of Hoskins'

⁴⁰ Note the Shires in *Lord of the Rings* as a similar landscape. See Glover 1984

⁴¹ Driver 1964 p58

⁴² Taylor in Hoskins 1992 p237

view of the English landscape. Leavis had mourned the displacement of “an old, mainly agricultural England” by modern, industrial organisation, the latter characterised by “a new mechanised vulgarity.” But for Williams, the social and political changes consequent upon the Industrial Revolution were not to be dismissed: “steam power, the petrol engine, electricity, these and their products in commodities and services, we took as quickly as we could get them, and we were glad.”⁴³

If one defence of the traditional landscape had been essentially aesthetic in character, Williams dealt with it in a peremptory fashion: could one ignore new forms of ugliness because of the advantages of plumbing, tractors, baby Austins, and contraceptives? “As a matter of priorities, yes, if necessary” was his answer although he doubted that the former was inevitably a consequence of the latter, and he held the optimistic view that “new sources of power, new methods of production, improved systems of transport and communication can, quite practically, make England clean and pleasant again.”⁴⁴ However, Williams’ critical approach to received ideas about the English landscape, both rural and urban, was only partly concerned with beauty and harmony. The more fundamental issue was one which concerned class and democracy and Williams’ critique of these was concerned with exploring the potential for a popular, democratic culture.

Williams’ novel, *Border Country* had a central character who had left his Welsh valley and working class community to become a university lecturer. On his return he was struck by the discrepancy between seeing the landscape and being part of it. Williams was later to explore this idea in the *Country and the City*, where he considered landscape not as an “elevated sensibility,” nor as “part of an elegy for a lost way of life,”⁴⁵ but as something that could represent “the condition and experience of those who worked the land,”⁴⁶ not a representation of them “as a landscape.”⁴⁷ This was not, furthermore, a simple

⁴³ Williams 1993 pp10-11

⁴⁴ Williams 1993 p11

⁴⁵ Williams 1973 pp120-1

⁴⁶ Daniels 1996 p330

⁴⁷ Williams 1973 p168

opposition between the local as the necessary source of authentic meaning and representations from a central authority, because another term, that of the region, was interceded. Stephen Daniels has argued that:

“For Williams, it is the regional dimension of the English novel which provides the potential to resist patrician or bourgeois forms of rural description. While the notion of region still carries its original implication of subordination and underdevelopment, it can also, in a more modern derivation, denote a counter-movement to a centralised, sophisticated notion of culture, carrying the implications of a valuably distinctive way of life.”⁴⁸

The concept of the regional landscape developed by Williams is valuable because there is no sense within it of any linear pattern of historical decline wherein the modern and the recent are inevitably inferior to the past. In ‘Culture is Ordinary’ Williams recounted his visit to a site of entrenched cultural authority, Hereford Cathedral, and his difficulty in gaining access to the ‘chained library’, even though a party of clergymen had been admitted without question. In contrast to this weighty experience, across the road from the cathedral was a cinema and advertisements for *The Six-Five Special* and a cartoon film of *Gulliver’s Travels*. Then, outside of the cathedral, the bus arrived and Williams was transported out of the city, into the Black Mountains, through a changing physical and historical landscape: “To the east, along the ridge, stood the line of grey Norman castles; to the west, the fortress wall of the mountains,” but then ahead: “the steel-rolling mill, the gasworks, the grey terraces, the pitheads.” And throughout this journey was the presence of the bus conductress and driver, “deeply absorbed in each other... They had done this journey so often, and seen all its stages.”⁴⁹

Mulhern comments on the way in which “the framing and sequence of [Williams’] narrative” had effectively “disordered” the familiar elements of “elite and popular, culture and commerce, town and country, past and present, continuity and change, sensibility and machinery,” which the writing of Eliot,

⁴⁸ Daniels 1996 p333

Hoggart or Leavis would have presented as fatal opposites.⁵⁰ The landscapes across which Williams travelled were not prioritised in these oppositional terms and if there was a privileged viewpoint it was that of the driver and conductress of the bus who were both of these places, yet not bound to them. The landscape was changing but this was not necessarily indicative of decline and to inhabit these places implied a degree of mobility. Williams refused to see contemporary space in terms of an inevitable opposition between the community lodged within a vernacular landscape, and the community dissolved within a landscape of mechanised vulgarity.

If the narrative of space in sixties Britain was founded on a long-established opposition between landscapes of proximity and mobility, these spaces also had a geographical dimension; space was also represented as *place* within the cultural geography of a North-South divide. A narrative which proclaimed the authenticity of the city and deplored suburban sprawl located authenticity within the working class communities of northern England. Rob Shields' has examined this North-South divide, arguing that the cultural division is contestable and maintains that the North is an example of the "representation of a region as a pastoral foil to other, collectively romanticised images of London and the South of England."⁵¹ The implication of this approach for the construction of nation is that whatever the North of England 'means' has to be understood in the context of broad processes of national identity formation; its meaning is not necessarily formed within its own boundaries but can be in part understood through processes taking place beyond the locality. Secondly, the precise boundaries of the tract of land constituting the North of England are less significant than the particular qualities and characteristics invested in this land and its people. The North has acquired a rhetorical significance. There is also the implication that neither the North nor the South exist as entities independent from one another but that, in terms of *cultural* geography, they are inter-dependent elements within a national space-myth. The North of England and

⁴⁹ Williams 1993 p5, cited by Mulhern 1996 p33-34

⁵⁰ Mulhern 1996 p34

⁵¹ Shields 1991 p207

the metropolitan South are both aspects of what Shields defines as a “spatial mythology.”⁵²

The rendering of a place into something primitive and ‘other’ had been done in the 19th century in the case of fishing communities. urban painters had established colonies amongst the fishing communities of St Ives, Newlin and Staithes and had produced romantic images of fisherfolk, depictions which emphasised their heroic but primitive characteristics and which were very popular with metropolitan audiences.⁵³ Romantic and picturesque representations were not necessarily confined to rural and coastal subjects, however, and there was a tendency from the 1930s onwards to also represent the urban in such a manner. Moorhouse observed that “since the paintings of L.S. Lowry became fashionable, it has become quite the thing to glory in the gaunt, angular townscapes of South Lancashire, though I have yet to meet anyone actually living in one of these back streets who appears to get much of a kick out of them.”⁵⁴ Although not scornful of the North of England this metropolitan viewpoint was one from outside and tended to invest in the North pastoral qualities.

Needless to say, this romantic view was only one way in which the North had been mythologised, other accounts dating from the 19th century expressing a far greater ambivalence towards industrialisation. Shields writes that “the industrialisation of the North saw the emergence of a powerful, urbanised, industrial bourgeoisie who aspired to the cultural legitimacy of the established aristocracy.”⁵⁵ This is a viewpoint but it might be argued that the northern bourgeoisie was more frequently concerned to distance itself from aristocratic values and to establish its respectability through the sponsorship of the arts and through civic patronage. Whilst the view of the North as largely composed of an urban working-class existed in the 19th century this group was also placed within a set of social relations. The 19th century literary perception of the North

⁵² Shields 1991 p207

⁵³ Nina Lübbren tells us that “fisherfolk were, next to peasants, the single most popular group subject in the Royal Academy’s annual exhibitions between 1880 and 1900” Lübbren 2002 p29

⁵⁴ Moorhouse 1964 p116

⁵⁵ Shields 1991 p214

of England was on the one hand of a region marked by poverty, social turmoil, disease, and a ruined landscape, on the other of a rude and untutored bourgeoisie, lacking in refined sensibilities. In Mrs Gaskell's *North and South* her heroine, whose father has been employed as a private tutor to a mill owner, wondered "what in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?"⁵⁶ The view of the North which emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries was complex, therefore, and whilst one aspect of this view emphasised poor working and living conditions, concerns which were also bound-up with anxieties about potential social unrest, another was associated with a distaste for the values of the industrial bourgeoisie in contrast to those of Tory paternalism, and yet another emphasised the independence of the former from the patronage of the aristocracy.

Most significant for this present study, however, was J.B. Priestley's view of northern England which was published in the 1930s but which both draws upon elements within the prevailing cultural geography of place whilst at the same time acknowledging the progressive and democratic impulse behind the modern, mobile landscape. According to Stuart Rawnsley, Priestley was "typical of a generation of writers who were totally immersed in Deep England, possibly through birth, or, in the case of Priestley himself, through a rejection of their birthplace."⁵⁷ Priestley is thus compared to the likes of Orwell whose attitude towards the social exploration of the North of England can be attributed to his class background and colonial experience. The suggestion that Priestley had rejected the industrial North in favour of a gentler and typically southern landscape ignores a far more complex if ambivalent attitude towards modernisation, however.

The spatial location of Priestley's ideal England is in the "urban civilisation of the North."⁵⁸ Priestley did write extensively about "slag-heaps, and mill chimneys

⁵⁶ Cited by Shields 1991 p210

⁵⁷ Rawnsley 2000 p17

⁵⁸ Baxendale 2001 p98

and doss-houses, back to back slums and cindery waste-grounds,”⁵⁹ but he was not only interested in a grim picture of industrial devastation. Also to be found are “Town Halls and Mechanics’ Institutes, Literary and Philosophical Societies, pier pavilions, fried-fish shops and chapels.”⁶⁰ Hardly an urban pastoral and not exclusively proletarian either. Baxendale notes the absence of the manual working class in Priestley’s novel, *Bright Day*, with its emphasis instead on the ‘people’ and on a radical populism, suggesting a “broader, more inclusive social identity.”⁶¹

Priestley’s view of Bradford was of an urban utopia, a “robust and democratic culture,”⁶² one which exhibited a regional self-sufficiency and which had little need for London: not hostility to the latter but an indifference towards it.⁶³ It was “a deceptively cosmopolitan world... where a Londoner was a stranger sight than a German.”⁶⁴ Edwardian Bradford may have offered to Priestley “all he wanted from a town,”⁶⁵ but it had fallen into ruin, caused partly by the “corrupting influence of Old England.”⁶⁶ Priestley continued to mourn this tragic loss but he also recognised the positive features of the new England of modernity, an essentially democratic culture which was epitomised by the popular entertainment industries and especially Blackpool.⁶⁷ Priestley’s attitude towards modernisation was founded upon an obvious and poignant contrast between the Edwardian Bradford of his youth and the present of his *English Journey*. As with the attitude taken towards modernisation in the 1960s, this contrast had a significant spatial and geographical dimension, but unlike Hoggart, for example, Priestley had a far more ambivalent attitude towards new forms of space.

⁵⁹ Baxendale 2001 p98, citation from Priestley 1934 p398

⁶⁰ Baxendale 2001 p98, citation from Priestley 1934 p400

⁶¹ Baxendale 2001 p102

⁶² Baxendale 2001 p99

⁶³ Baxendale 2001 p103

⁶⁴ Baxendale 2001 p100, citation from Priestley 1934 p160

⁶⁵ Baxendale 2001 p104

⁶⁶ Baxendale 2001 p104

⁶⁷ Although Priestley was also ambivalent. He was not a champion of ‘Deep England’ but he shared some contemporary anxieties about suburbia.

This type of politics of place, which Priestley in part advocated, can be further considered through some of the ideas expressed in Jackson's *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. Jackson defined landscape in broad terms as a composition of synthetic spaces which served as "infrastructure or background for our collective existence."⁶⁸ Jackson also argued that, historically, there had tended to be two types of landscape: clusters of "small, temporary, crudely measured spaces which frequently changed hands and even changed in shape and size,"⁶⁹ and more permanent types of space, emphasising origin, boundary, structure, permanence and, ultimately, *place*. The permanent and visible structures (effectively, what are generally known as communities) with clear, demarcated boundaries were those which provided continuity, contributed to collective memory and gave people their identities.

Jackson's study provides some insights into Priestley's view of Edwardian Bradford, which appeared to be the kind of place defined by Jackson as purposeful and providing of identity. Jackson suggested that places function to "make us visible, [to] allow us to put down roots and become members of society."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the implication of such a landscape was to "greatly exaggerate the importance of belonging to a community" which was actually a "tightly organised hierarchy of landowners and masters and workers [within which] not every applicant was admitted, and the conditions attached to membership were strict and arbitrary."⁷¹ Baxendale reminds us that in Priestley's Edwardian Bradford most people couldn't vote.⁷²

In contrast to this traditional, ordered landscape which provided the physical environment within which collective memory and identity could be formed, Jackson expresses both bewilderment as well as a certain optimism at the "proliferation of spaces and the uses of spaces that had no counterpart in the traditional landscape: parking lots, landing fields, shopping centres, trailer

⁶⁸ Jackson 1984 p319

⁶⁹ Jackson 1984 p321

⁷⁰ Jackson 1984 p324

⁷¹ Jackson 1984 p327

⁷² Baxendale 2001

courts, high-rise condominiums, wildlife shelters, Disneyland.”⁷³ Jackson considers these to be, in one sense, landscapes of cultural poverty without purposeful continuity, without visible signs of memory; yet they had a vitality and diversity that was often unrecognised. More significant, however, was that in such landscapes “place means the people in it” rather than the permanent structures of “belonging” associated with the traditional community,⁷⁴ and these “vernacular communities” whilst unplanned, without political status, informal and ingeniously adaptable to the most unlikely sites and materials could, nevertheless, “acquire dignity if the political landscape made a gesture of recognition.”⁷⁵

In the 1930s it is unlikely that Priestley could have tolerated the full implications of Jackson’s definition of landscape, that “it is not scenery, it is not a political unit; it is really no more than a collection, a system of man-made spaces on the surface of the earth.”⁷⁶ Priestley was attached to the landscape of the lost ‘northern republic’,⁷⁷ seeing northern regional identity as associated with a rich and varied culture with its own economic and cultural connections to other cultures and nations, which transcended London. In an earlier phase of British capitalist development the manufacturing bourgeoisie both lived in the locality and had a stake in it,⁷⁸ and if the popular radical possibilities in this earlier situation are contestable there was, nevertheless, a regional and civic culture which was underpinned by a degree of economic strength. Although Priestley had been sympathetic to those manifestations of cultural democracy that were observable in the leisure industries and in new forms of mobility, he had not been able to entirely reconcile this view with his mourning for the loss of something more substantial. By the early 1960s newer forms of working class culture had become far more prevalent than during the 1930s and, as Hoggart and the New Wave would indicate, far more of a source of cultural anxiety. Priestley was capable of ambivalence with regard to new cultural forms: “the England of arterial and by-pass roads” could be written of in the same sentence

⁷³ Jackson 1984 p326

⁷⁴ Jackson 1984 p327

⁷⁵ Jackson 1984 p327

⁷⁶ Jackson 1984 p327

⁷⁷ See Nairn 1988

as “Woolworths, motor-coaches, wireless, hiking [and] factory girls looking like actresses,”⁷⁹ as signs of the new England which were not necessarily harmful. The 1960s witnessed an acceleration in social and cultural change and the creation of dramatic new landscapes of mobility, to which there was an ambivalent response.

What’s Wrong With Britain?

There were palpable transformations of space in early sixties Britain, the physical landscape was changed and the symbolism associated with new and older landscapes was contested and rearticulated. Whilst a writer such as Hoggart was clearly out of sympathy with the new mobile landscape, others took a more positive approach. The modernisation of the spatial environment is a facet of the concluding chapter of Anthony Sampson’s *Anatomy of Britain*, in which he referred to “that long unchanging time, from 1939 to 1957 when Britain in its outward shape seemed insulated against change, and which was itself preceded by the stagnation of the thirties.”⁸⁰ Although the social consequences of 1945 had been profound, these took over a decade to have an impact on the landscape, then, suddenly, “skyscrapers rushed up, supermarkets spread over cities.” Some writers have considered Sampson’s conclusions as indicative of cultural pessimism: “The anatomists of British society,” argues Hewison, “were all alarmed by the cultural pattern that was emerging.”⁸¹ However, modernisers such as Sampson were frustrated by the current condition of British society, but this did not take the form of cultural anxiety, rather it was the nation’s archaism and post-imperial decay which was the source of their disquiet: “The old privileged values of aristocracy, public schools and Oxbridge, ... an oppressive lack of innovation and zeal.” British institutions had “become dangerously out of touch with the public, insensitive to change, and dangerously wrapped up in their private rituals.”⁸²

⁷⁸ See Baxendale 2001 p102 discussing Joyce 1991

⁷⁹ Priestley 1934 p375

⁸⁰ Sampson 1962 p636

⁸¹ Hewison 1986 p8

⁸² Sampson 1962 p638

Sampson's book can be placed within the larger context of ongoing debates about modernisation. Britain in the early sixties is frequently remembered as a (failed) moment of modernisation, when the language of progress, science and technology replaced that of heritage and tradition, a moment which briefly coincided with the election of a Labour government whose rhetoric was also expressed in the language of modernity. Whilst Wilson's government was committed to many traditional Labour objectives and whilst he gained the leadership of the Labour Party with the support of the Left, 'modernisation' had a broader meaning. The language and the literature of modernisation in early sixties Britain was in part a challenge to the entrenched cultural power of the establishment, but it also offered a critique of some of the assumptions of the New Left and contested the spatialisation of the nation in the terms expressed in Hoggart and the New Wave, for example. *The Uses of Literacy* and the British New Wave had both represented class spatially, in each instance the threatened, traditional working class community being contained within a particular type of landscape. Both Hoggart and the New Wave also drew upon an established cultural geography within which particular types of landscape were regionally distributed and within which the division between the North and the South was given a primary significance. The working class was represented as occupying a specifically North of England landscape.

So one way of reading the 1960s modernisation debate is in spatial terms. A body of literature produced in the late fifties and early sixties on the theme of 'What's wrong with Britain?' initiated a debate around modernisation which also had implications for the way in which geography and landscape were viewed. These accounts were emphatic in their denunciation of the archaism of British institutions but also began to discuss the structural inequalities which characterised Britain in terms of the uneven distribution of affluence. Some of these were books, of which a number appeared in the form of 'Penguin Specials', others appeared as articles in the press. In 1959 in *The Labour Case*, a Penguin Special written by Roy Jenkins and advocating the return of a Labour government, Jenkins cautioned against complaints about "the corrupting effects of ... motor-cars and refrigerators" from those who had "long possessed"

such items.⁸³ The limited availability of goods and services which might make Britain a more civilised place⁸⁴ was an important indicator of persistent social inequality, in Jenkins estimation. In a series of subsequent publications, which Jenkins' book and Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* partly initiated, the absence of such benefits was discussed in structural, geographical and cultural terms.

The 'What's wrong with Britain?' publications were concerned with Britain's poor economic performance but tended to analyse the cause of this in terms of institutional archaism and the problem of the 'establishment.' The latter was taken to indicate institutions such as the civil service, the B.B.C, the public schools,⁸⁵ and the 'City,'⁸⁶ but also problematic were the trade unions and their position in society, the system of industrial relations,⁸⁷ and, more fundamentally, the characteristics of the traditional working class. This literature was not left-wing in any conventional sense of the term but there was a general admiration for the productivity and technocratic efficiency of state socialism which could be sharply distinguished from Britain's post-imperial torpor: On a lunch visit to the British legation in Sofia, Michael Shanks, author of *The Stagnant Society*, was moved to contrast the microcosm of Britain's archaism he found inside: "the flavour of elegance, of style," with socialist Bulgaria's "tough, workaday atmosphere."⁸⁸ Shanks did not favour Communism in the slightest but saw the possibility of defeat "because of our apparent inability to concentrate our energies to the same extent as our opponents."⁸⁹ The consequences of failure would not be military defeat but a dismal post-imperial stagnation, and Shanks asked the reader:

"What sort of an island do we want to be? ... A lotus island of easy, tolerant ways, bathed in the golden glow of an imperial sunset, shielded from discontent

⁸³ Jenkins 1959 p55

⁸⁴ 'Is Britain Civilised?' Jenkins 1959 pp135-146

⁸⁵ Thomas 1959

⁸⁶ Ferris 1962

⁸⁷ Wigham 1961; Shanks 1961

⁸⁸ Shanks 1961 p15

⁸⁹ Shanks 1961 p28

by a threadbare welfare state and an acceptance of genteel poverty? Or the tough dynamic race we have been in the past?”⁹⁰

The approach of the literature was hostile to Britain’s feeble upper-class but it was not conciliatory towards the working class in its traditional and established forms. Shanks argued that “the most outstanding characteristic of the older working class communities, which can be seen in their purist form in the mining villages or in the docker’s settlements in the great ports, is their exclusiveness.”⁹¹ Whilst such tightly knit communities fostered a necessary, defensive solidarity they were also characterised by, especially in Yorkshire and the North East, “a certain poverty of demand, bred of conservatism, social homogeneity (viz, the peculiar Yorkshire hatred of ostentation, of ‘trying to be what you’re not’), and a sheer lack of awareness of the new horizons opened up by the affluent society.”⁹²

England’s Cultural Geography

Moorhouse’s account constitutes the main case study occupying the rest of this chapter. Moorhouse’s, *The Other England*, published in 1964, promoted a reappraisal of the nation’s cultural geography. Moorhouse’s study began by criticising metropolitan arrogance with respect to the North, suggesting that a disdain for northern England was an upper middle class affectation. Moorhouse provided numerous anecdotes to support this, including the correspondent of a London based newspaper who lamented that one could not “take aubergines for granted out of town,” and the travel writer who was familiar with France but had never visited the Lake District.⁹³

It was suggested earlier that the antithesis between mass culture and purportedly authentic cultural forms was spatialised through an opposition between the city and suburbia. In those writers with a modernising agenda, however, such an opposition was associated with a resistance to progress and mobility. The North-South divide was identified by Moorhouse as a source of

⁹⁰ Shanks 1961 p232

⁹¹ Shanks 1961 p60

⁹² Shanks 1961p65

myth, an unsatisfactory cultural geography which should be replaced by a more mobile geography. Moorhouse, like Shanks, expressed a certain impatience with the resistance to affluence encountered in some working class communities; but he was far more concerned with discussing landscapes, regions, and cities in terms of their accessibility or isolation, and their propensity to encourage, or limit access to the “new culture.” Although he didn’t use the terms, Moorhouse’s study is a very good illustration of those geographical sensibilities at work in the early sixties which divided space into competing landscapes of proximity and mobility. Unlike Hoggart, Hoskins and aspects of the New Wave, however, Moorhouse’s sympathies were with the latter rather than the former.

In the West Riding of Yorkshire, Moorhouse identified a region stubbornly disassociated from new forms of cultural mobility and affluence, a condition to which Yorkshire’s wild and bleak landscape is made to contribute: “The lie of the land in the West Riding has more than anything been responsible for [the] deep attachment to locality.” Towns were “segregated by the spurs and outcrops of the Pennines.” communities began “in a deep valley and remain concentrated there, a tightly packed collection of buildings in blackening millstone grit, barely distinguishable at a distance from the exposed knobs of rock on the surrounding hills.”⁹⁴ The cultural consequences of this landscape were significant because “the hills, besides hatching off one town from another, have effectively barricaded Yorkshire against the rest of England”⁹⁵ and therefore slowed down the intrusion of “alien habits... Far fewer churches and chapels here have been translated into warehouses or motor showrooms than has been the case in, for instance, South Lancashire.”⁹⁶ This was linked to a certain indifference to new popular cultural forms, young people at a rugby match attended by Moorhouse appeared to be indifferent to the music of The Beatles,⁹⁷ whereas Lancastrians seemed far more responsive to the new culture: “*Coronation Street* may have carried the local image into unsuspecting

⁹³ Moorhouse pp23-24

⁹⁴ Moorhouse 1964 p148

⁹⁵ Moorhouse 1964 p149

⁹⁶ Moorhouse 1964 p149

⁹⁷ Moorhouse 1964 pp146-147

recesses of Southern England, but at the same time *Juke Box Jury* is conveying the new culture to Oswaldtwistle and Boggart Hole Clough. The Lancashire paving stones still echo to the clatter of clogs, but more frequently now the millworkers pad along on crêpe soles.”⁹⁸

To a large extent Moorhouse can be read as a revisionist geography, concerned with undermining myths locating poverty as well as authenticity in particular types of space and location. He was particularly concerned to undermine the cultural geography of the North-South divide, hence an interest in regions which defied expectations. Moorhouse’s account of Cornwall, for example, identified poor communication as a major source of its ills. Cornish self identity was diminished because of its isolation, not because it was inaccessible from London but because the lack of good train services and roads inhibited the development of indigenous industry. One of the most significant regions discussed was East Anglia, notable for the unevenness of its economic and infrastructural development.

Essex, which in a formal sense was part of East Anglia, was integrated into the London metropolitan area by virtue of commuter rail links, which made a place such as Clacton accessible to the day tripper from London with all of the cultural consequences that entailed.⁹⁹ Norfolk and Suffolk on the other hand, the area between the Stour valley and the Wash, “were as remote from metropolitan England as that other extremity in the far West.”¹⁰⁰ We will recall that the East Country had exercised Hoskins: “poor devastated Lincolnshire and Suffolk” were symbolic of an English landscape that was too integrated into the modern world through, amongst other things, the agency of “the arterial by-pass.” Moorhouse, too, recognised this landscape as partially militarised, noticeably with respect to “the recurrent scream of military aircraft and the gingerly movement of over-developed automobiles, swaying heavily on indulgent suspension systems, dangling registration plates from Florida, Virginia, and

⁹⁸ Moorhouse p118

⁹⁹ Clashes between Mods and Rockers at Clacton at Easter 1964 symbolised this accessibility.

¹⁰⁰ Moorhouse 1964 p68

points West.”¹⁰¹ There was also a recognition that agriculture in East Anglia operated on virtually industrial lines with many large North American style ranches dominating the landscape and the local economy; an illustration of combined and uneven development. But despite these pockets of development the main difficulty faced by East Anglia was the harshness of a type of poverty and cultural backwardness that was a result of isolation.

“There is a village not ten miles from Ipswich which, apart from its electricity and its piped water supply, has scarcely budged an inch since the Middle-Ages,” Moorhouse reported.¹⁰² Whereas some of the service and infrastructure problems facing East Anglia were cultural, as with the devoted readers of the *Guardian* living in backwaters like Wells-next-the-Sea, Beccles and Bungay who could not receive it on the day of publication,¹⁰³ there were also villages in Suffolk which had neither sewerage nor drainage. If the wholesale transformation of Norfolk and Suffolk into versions of Essex and Hertfordshire seemed unattractive, the alternative was that the area experience a “creeping death ... The East Country cannot stay as it is, virtually unviolated, its people so conscious of their inaccessibility,”¹⁰⁴ stated Moorhouse.

The problems of sixties East Anglia were overwhelmingly related to planning, or the absence of it, and the implication of Moorhouse’s study was that a relationship needed to be established between the vernacular landscape and a national infrastructure upon which it must ultimately depend for survival. A consideration of Jackson’s very different American landscapes shed some light on the complexity of the problem. Communities within Jackson’s vernacular landscapes might come together as makeshift and temporary arrangements and survive through the “unending, patient adjustment to circumstances.”¹⁰⁵ The appearance of “the trailer communities that vanish when vacation time is over”¹⁰⁶ was dependent, though, on the interstate highway, which was an

¹⁰¹ Moorhouse 1964 p70

¹⁰² Moorhouse 1964 p72

¹⁰³ This was after the newspaper had dropped ‘Manchester’ from its title but was not yet printed in London

¹⁰⁴ Moorhouse 1964 p74

¹⁰⁵ Jackson 1984 p323

¹⁰⁶ Jackson 1984 p326

element of planned infrastructure, and when discussing the conditions under which vernacular communities could be made viable these were symbolised by the expression “people follow plumbing,” as “utilities are the infrastructure of any residential community.”¹⁰⁷ The uniqueness of parts of East Anglia was in the ways they had somehow escaped many of the transformations of the 19th and 20th centuries but, like Jackson’s vernacular landscapes, ultimately, their viability was dependent on access to modern amenities and infrastructure.

A lack of modern infrastructure did not characterise Birmingham, the jewel in the crown of early sixties modernisation in Moorhouse’s account. If some regions were reluctant to embrace change and were resistant to high levels of consumption (typically the enclosed working class communities in the manufacturing towns of West Yorkshire) there was a place which exhibited none of this resistance. During the late 1950s and early 1960s Birmingham was, alongside of places such as Luton, regarded as “the heartland of working class affluence.”¹⁰⁸ Graham Turner had argued in 1964 that the lack of responsiveness of the Birmingham working class to traditional appeals to class solidarity was as a consequence of their lack of attachment to established communities: “For decades, workers from all over Britain have been trekking to the car cities ... These are men who are prepared to up stakes, to take risks, to cast themselves hopefully into new environments.”¹⁰⁹ This lack of class consciousness was reflected in a very moderate Labour Council which was, from 1959 to 1966, run by Harry Watton with an iron hand. Watton’s strategy had been to placate Conservative voters and in 1963 the general rate subsidy for housing was abolished.¹¹⁰

“Nowhere in England is there more excitement in the air” than in Birmingham, declared Moorhouse,¹¹¹ a claim which he supports with much evidence from the development of the Bull Ring market. Moorhouse praises the splendour of the Rotunda office block: “No one ever thought of making one of those in England

¹⁰⁷ Jackson 1984 p327

¹⁰⁸ Smith 1987 p285

¹⁰⁹ Turner 1964 pp103-4

¹¹⁰ Smith 1987 p285

¹¹¹ Moorhouse 1964 p93

before,”¹¹² and of the new method of managing pedestrians: “there are streets along which traffic can whiz without getting jammed up by crossing pedestrians because someone has had the bright idea that it is possible for people on foot to get from one side to the other by going under a main thoroughfare.”¹¹³ Birmingham was, furthermore, a city with an international reputation: “You would, I imagine, have to go to some of the Dutch and German cities to see somewhere changing its shape and its approach to life as dramatically as Birmingham,”¹¹⁴ and its “forward movement has been impressive enough to attract men like Gropius and Gibberd to produce plans there.”¹¹⁵

Whilst clearly mesmerised by the presence in the city of prestigious commercial architecture which rivalled London’s new skyscrapers, and the new road systems, it was the city’s commitment to modernisation as a principle which so impressed Moorhouse and which distinguished the city from conservative Manchester. Remarkably, though, there is virtually no reference to culture, either past or present, popular or otherwise, except in the form of a rather abstract civic pride: in a quotation from Joseph Chamberlain’s mayoral accession speech of 1873, that “In twelve months, with God’s help, this town shall not know itself,”¹¹⁶ in an extract from the civic guide claiming that the city “is rarely subject to extremes of heat, cold, wind, or rain which from time to time affect places in the vicinity,”¹¹⁷ and in another from the same publication stating that “many of the world’s finest organists have joined with the City Organist in giving recitals on the Town Hall’s massive organ, admittedly one of the finest in the country.”¹¹⁸ There are shops, although presumably not yet finished as the only reference to them is of the new- fangled concrete slopes which have replaced steps and which will provide access to women pushing prams. And as viewers of the early evening soap opera *Crossroads* were aware (it was set in a motel), the greatest significance of Birmingham in the early 1960s was as a city

¹¹² Moorhouse 1964 p93

¹¹³ Moorhouse 1964 pp93-94

¹¹⁴ Moorhouse 1964 p93

¹¹⁵ Moorhouse 1964 p95

¹¹⁶ Citation from Moorhouse 1964 p92

¹¹⁷ Moorhouse 1964 p92

¹¹⁸ Moorhouse 1964 p98

of mobility, a place which could be envisioned through the extensive motorway network which surrounded it. Hardly a Northern Arcadia.

If an orthodox cultural geography of the North-South divide invested northern locales with the characteristics of the respectable working class community (a landscape of proximity) these were characteristics not normally associated with Liverpool. Interestingly, Liverpool was the place in the North of England which excited Moorhouse's enthusiasm the most, and this was because, like Birmingham, although in different ways, it was a place governed by mobility. Liverpool had a well established reputation as an unconventional city, an image which caused consternation to those residents who wished to foster a more respectable reputation. Inter-regional rivalry also compounded the sense of injustice felt by respectable Liverpool citizens who felt that "Manchester with its 'absurd and harmful pretensions' was one of the malign forces kindling Liverpool's poor public image."¹¹⁹

The interesting aspect of these perceptions is the attitude towards respectability. As one might imagine, civic leaders and other respectable citizens of Liverpool were mortified by the way in which their city was often represented, nevertheless, others found this very image invigorating. This can be illustrated by Moorhouse's contrast between Manchester and Liverpool. Moorhouse argued that Manchester's problem in the early sixties was its deep attachment to a once significant role as a rival to London, when all of those aspects of its civic and economic life which had provided it with the foundation for such a claim had disappeared. Whereas "in Birmingham you feel that they long since recognised their problems, thrashed out half a dozen possible solutions, and proceeded to adopt the one that seemed most likely to do the job best, ... Manchester [in contrast] seems to have quietly dozed off, dreaming of the grandeur that was cottonopolis."¹²⁰ Manchester had fallen on hard times:

"Once upon a time politicians with something momentous to utter entrained for Manchester and the Free Trade Hall. The portentous surroundings, the gritty

¹¹⁹ Russell 2000. Russell's citation is from the *Liverpool Daily Post* 20 April 1964.

audience, the gloomy night outside; all conspired to lend weight to their words. This has gone now. The last great political speech heard in Manchester was Sir Winston Churchill's in the 1950 election campaign."¹²¹

This political significance was related to the city's commercial power, which had reached its zenith during the Edwardian period when the saying "what Manchester does today, London thinks tomorrow"¹²² had been construed. Manchester, particularly through the influence of C.P. Scott's *Manchester Guardian*, had considered itself to be "a strong provincial bastion against the corrosive influence of the Metropolis."¹²³ Now, the *Guardian* was gone and the city's commercial influence had waned considerably, symbolised in 1963 by the closure of the U.S. consulate, despite the Lord Mayor's appeal for the decision to be reconsidered.

Sleepy Manchester, then, dreaming of cottonopolis. But Manchester's problem was not so much its pretentiousness as its failure to adapt to new times, in contrast to forward-looking Birmingham with its self-confident commercial architecture and underground pedestrian thoroughfares. But in contrast to both of these and rather exceptionally in a book which was largely concerned with disposing of myths, Moorhouse's went on to give an account of Liverpool, as wild, exotic and disrespectable, functioning as the North's 'other'. Liverpool exhibited none of the splendid architectural features of a site such as Birmingham but was not burdened with the conservatism of Manchester still filled with civic pride in past achievements, nor did its unskilled population have any of the characteristics of the respectable working class.

It is indicative of our changed perspective in the last 40 years that Moorhouse states in the introduction to his book that "I have written about the tension of Liverpool and said nothing at all about its cultural life,"¹²⁴ whereas my reading of this section, which is one of the lengthiest descriptions of a city, is that it is

¹²⁰ Moorhouse 1964 p127-128

¹²¹ Michael Kennedy *Daily Telegraph* August 1962, cited by Moorhouse 1964 p127

¹²² Moorhouse 1964 p126

¹²³ Moorhouse 1964 p126

¹²⁴ Moorhouse 1964 p12

concerned with little else other than the city's culture. Furthermore, Moorhouse is indulgent towards those aspects of Liverpool which signify a lack of respectability, in fact helping to perpetrate the romantic myth of a vital if abrasive and violent city based upon an identifiable cultural identity. Admittedly Liverpool had a bigger slum problem than Manchester, employment was precarious, and it could be dangerous: "Liverpool is about the only English provincial city where if you walk alone after midnight ... you stand a fair chance of ending up in the gutter with your wallet missing,"¹²⁵ and mindlessly destructive: "its new housing estates trees are regularly destroyed by vandals, apparently just for the hell of it."¹²⁶ And yet, despite all of this, or possibly because of it, "Liverpool has an air which Manchester lacks. Not to say a swagger and a sense of adventure."¹²⁷

The tension in Liverpool life was in part a consequence of its status as a seaport. Any seaport in the world would be exposed to violence: "bouts of brawling which are a natural release after days of confined discipline at sea. The brothel, the boozier and the brawl are the seaman's shoreside opium."¹²⁸ In Liverpool the violence was regarded as "an accepted method of self-expression," involving not just "broken teeth and black-eyes but something uglier and much more frightening. People get thrown through shop windows or kicked into a coma on the ground."¹²⁹ Liverpool's position as a seaport also gave it an extraordinary and liminal quality which could be found in its "cosmopolitan touches in the lascars shuffling gloomily along wind-whipped Lime Street, and in the shops and restaurants of the Chinese community."¹³⁰

Partly as a consequence of its function as a seaport, partly because of its proximity to Ireland and Wales, Liverpool had an ethnically mixed population unlike anywhere else in England which also contributed to the tension within the city, reflected most clearly in the enduring conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, the organisation of these groups into rival territory and the

¹²⁵ Moorhouse 1964 p132

¹²⁶ Moorhouse 1964 p132

¹²⁷ Moorhouse 1964 p132

¹²⁸ Moorhouse 1964 p133

¹²⁹ Moorhouse 1964 p133

viciousness of its local politics. Liverpool also had football crowds tougher than most and distinct from other English crowds. Moorhouse's study indicates that there was a long history of rather distasteful prejudice with respect to Liverpool football fans, long preceding events at Hillsborough. Moorhouse's reminiscences of his time supporting Bolton Wanderers just after the war. Regarding Liverpool supporters, Moorhouse commented that they were: "A strange, alien people they were, too, who swore more fluently and often than we did and who openly relieved themselves on the Bolton terraces." Their reputation for violence continued and "If ever we have an English football crowd rioting as they riot in South America, Italy and other intemperate spots, the chances are that it will be at Anfield or Goodison Park."¹³¹

Moorhouse's representation of Liverpool in such a manner was paralleled in other, more countercultural accounts, an unusual one being the Situationist inspired journal *Heatwave*, which offered its own perspective on the politics and culture of the North-South divide in its first issue, published in July, 1966, stating that: "If London has the most with-it, the most cultured, refined and studiously pleasure seeking hips then Liverpool has the most in number. London hips have arrived. Liverpool hips have never been anywhere else."¹³² During a period when the term 'swinging' London had gained currency and when the capital began to acquire an international significance as a hip and radical place, a statement such as the above has some interest. O'Connor's is a short article which briefly celebrated the *lumpen* and subcultural elements in Liverpool alongside of artists and intellectuals who might identify with these: "footy-fans, teddy boys, hitch-hikers, comics, general piss-take artists, trainwreckers, intellectuals, wildcat strikers and scrubber birds..."¹³³ He is less sympathetic to the respectable working class which makes no appearance. He is hostile to the bourgeoisie, which seems to be a term he uses here to designate anyone middle-aged and respectable: "...before the night comes they have escaped

¹³⁰ Moorhouse 1964 p132

¹³¹ Moorhouse 1964 p136

¹³² O'Connor 1966

¹³³ O'Connor 1966

safely in the red buses to Crosby clutching their little green bags with their hats pinned to their heads, leaving the world to darkness and to pleasure.”¹³⁴

The context for this representation of Liverpool was in part the kind of romantic myth identified in the New Wave films (although none of these were located in the city), in part a response to the enormous wave of national interest in Liverpool that accompanied the emergence of the Beatles.¹³⁵ In fact the new musical phenomenon had produced a degree of ambivalence within Liverpool’s press. One columnist was anxious that the Beatles should not contribute to the image of the city as composed of “slums, ships, soccer and insobriety,”¹³⁶ whilst another hoped the image of a Liverpudlian had now been changed “from that of a thug with a length of bicycle chain to that of a lively young man with a fringe.”¹³⁷

The idea that the Beatles represented an interesting and positive mutation of youth culture was one shared by Moorhouse who considered that the violence and tension (which he, nevertheless, seemed to be enamoured by) would now be dissolved in the “jerky rhythms which constitute the Merseyside Sound,”¹³⁸ basing this notion on an article written by a Liverpool student in *New Society*, suggesting that violent gang solidarities were being replaced by a more benign music-based subculture. This ambivalence towards the vitalistic and violent elements within Liverpool culture was further expressed in his remarks about the Beatles that, despite fame and fortune, none of them is interested in leaving Liverpool for good and that: “for all its ugliness, for all its precariousness of life there, for all that along Scotland Road on a dark night you’re liable to get your teeth kicked in..., Liverpool maintains a queer, rather sinister, hold over its people.”¹³⁹

Moorhouse linked the significance and growth of Merseyside beat music to the seamen on the New York and Hamburg routes: “If a member of such a group

¹³⁴ O’Connor 1966

¹³⁵ For a novel which also provides a context for this Hignett 1966

¹³⁶ *Liverpool Echo and Evening News* 28 October 1963, cited in Russell 2000 p37

¹³⁷ *Liverpool Post* columnist, cited in Russell 2000 p37

¹³⁸ Moorhouse 1964 p140

had not himself been to sea a brother or a mate would have been and they brought back records from these places, which are both in the forefront of jazz evolution.”¹⁴⁰ This was perhaps the case but François Poirier, in his research into the New York-Liverpool connection has suggested that “the US base of Burtonwood near Liverpool ... was a readier source of American music than the erratic life of anarchistic seafarers.”¹⁴¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, it has been argued that representations of space (in terms of competing landscapes of proximity and mobility and in the form of a contested national geography) were prevalent in the 1960s and were one form within which the New Left and modernisers both within and outside of the movement debated the merits of social and cultural change. In the films of the New Wave, suburbia was seen as a degraded form of living, to be contrasted with the authentic working class community. But in these films, and to once again reiterate their distinctiveness from Hoggart, there was also represented (if not directly on the screen, then as a distant possibility) another source of authentic life in the form of artistic bohemia.¹⁴²

Whilst the New Wave was able to imagine these forms of bohemian space there was a modernising literature which focused more around the problems of isolation within an immobile society. Forms of immobility were both physical: the lack of adequate transport, the absence of infrastructure; but also cultural: the lack of access to the benefits of affluence and a lack of responsiveness to pop culture. Some of these accounts wished to see the population engaged with new forms of consumerism which their isolated, enclosed, proletarian communities were resistant to, but to understand the literature of modernisation simply in such terms would be to neglect its broader meaning. Raymond

¹³⁹ Moorhouse 1964 p140

¹⁴⁰ Moorhouse 1964 p138

¹⁴¹ François Poirier 'The New York – Liverpool Connection' A paper presented at the Veliko-Turnovo (Bulgaria) conference, 7-9 April 2002: *America across cultures: Europe and beyond*. Published online at: <http://www.univ-paris13.fr/CRIDAF/TEXTES/NY-Lpl/NY-LplConexn06.htm> [10, 04, 04]

¹⁴² In *Room at the Top*, the character Alice is French and an 'artist'; in *Billy Liar* the character Liz is already part of the swinging London scene.

Williams, for example, wrote eloquently about the benefits of forms of mechanisation which helped to breakdown the isolation and impoverishment of communities. Moorhouse was enamoured with forms of mobility which in some respects were compatible with new developments within capitalism and new patterns of consumption, but his views were also comparable to those found amongst some Pop theorists as was the case with his representation of Liverpool.

Of some interest with respect to later chapters (Chapter Six, in particular) is the argument presented here that J.B. Priestley's sometimes positive view of modernisation in the 1930s might be usefully read through J.B Jackson's ideas with respect to the vernacular landscape. One of the consequences of a cultural divide between North and South was that it emphasised particular places as important in terms of belonging, identity formation, permanence and memory. Whilst Priestley was nostalgic about Edwardian Bradford which he saw in these terms he was also, perhaps contradictorily, prepared to see the value (sometimes) in a more mobile and democratic culture. Jackson's cultural geography allows one to think about the forms of democratic landscape which lacked permanence but which were nevertheless purposeful and responsive to needs and desires. This was also the conclusion of Peter Hall in the late sixties and Gary Cross, much later, with respect to megalopolis and the suburb. Cross argued that the suburb, far from being alien to the broad interests of its working class inhabitants, represented the establishment of a space free from the demands of work and the market.

Whilst some sections of the New Left continued to adopt a Romantic attitude towards space and in the later sixties looked towards forms of the space which could liberate the alienated subject, other tendencies were developing amongst enthusiasts for modernisation, and amongst Pop theorists. These tendencies will be explored in the next two chapters.

Chapter Five

Space and Revolution: Students, the New Left, the 'Counterculture' and the Politics of 1968

Introduction

Space and processes of spatialisation have been prevalent themes in previous chapters. Whilst we have examined the attitude towards popular culture of writers such as Hoggart and pop theorists such as Reyner Banham, the foundation of their views, it has been suggested, was in their outlook towards contemporary processes of cultural and geographical mobility. In the last chapter spatialisation was considered in terms of competing narratives of proximity and mobility, which it was argued were fundamental to the early sixties debate about modernisation. The intention has been to examine a range of familiar aspects of Britain's history in the 1960s and reconfigure them around the spatialisation process. I have done this because the sixties was self-evidently a moment of acute spatial transformation and I would like to demonstrate that such a change was more profound and extensive than just the construction of new city centres and tower blocks, but penetrated also quite deeply into consciousness of personal space, class, community and national geography.

Given this objective a consideration of the New Left and the particular significance of 1968 is necessary and it will be an argument in this chapter that the moment of 1968 can be usefully understood as a politics of space. The key to such an understanding is to examine the relationship in the upheavals of 1968 between the aims and objectives of radical politics, as these had been conventionally understood, and cultural issues. This is neatly summarised in Anthony Edmond's discussion of the student movement in Britain, which he defined as "exhibiting the usual tensions between political activism and cultural rebellion, between the raised fist and the raised joint."¹

¹ Edmonds 1994 p2

A suitable starting point for this discussion will be a consideration of the role and significance of the intelligentsia. It will be recalled that Hoggart observed a tendency amongst a certain section of the upwardly mobile towards pretentiousness in taste and the acquisition of half-baked intellectual ideas. Hoggart had a low opinion of those whose education had not equipped them for serious critical thought and who engaged in a superficial way with intellectual currents. By the middle of the 1960s there had been some dramatic changes to this emerging group. Eight years of university expansion had produced a larger and more educated group than Hoggart could have imagined. It is symptomatic of this historical moment, however, that Perry Anderson, whilst he considered the intelligentsia as a vital component in revolutionary struggle, characterised the deficiencies of this group in terms similar to those of Hoggart. Anderson's mid sixties view of the intelligentsia will be contrasted with a slightly later view expressed by Marcuse. For both theorists the intelligentsia was significant but there is a marked difference in their approach. In contrast to Anderson, Marcuse's view was underpinned by his understanding of consumer capitalism and the particular role of a dissenting intelligentsia within its spaces, the latter invested by Marcuse with psychological characteristics.

There will then follow a discussion of the events around 1968 in Britain. The rapidity of events during 1968 led the New Left to reassess the position of student militants who were now given the role of the dissenting intelligentsia which Anderson had considered to be so vital. Drawing from a wide range of theoretical sources (Mao, Althusser, Marcuse, Lefebvre and Debord) New Left activists, writing in early 1969,² argued that universities could become liberated zones, comparable to Mao's establishment of red bases during the Chinese revolution. Importantly, though, the overall argument for 'student power' owed a great deal more to theories of advanced capitalism found in the work of Lefebvre than to the Chinese experience of guerrilla warfare. Essentially it was an argument about those particular physical and institutional spaces which constituted the weakest link in the imperialist chain (as Lenin and Althusser

termed it) but also the psychological characteristics of such spaces. This was an emerging politics within which the personal was not differentiated from social and more obviously 'political' concerns. Whilst student militancy was the occasion for this important theoretical debate the focal point of space suggests broader concerns, and one manifestation of the red base in the late sixties was the 'anti-institution.' Inherent in the moment of 1968 was an alternative spatialisation which promoted various manifestations of the anti-institution, which in one guise can be found in such spontaneous appropriations of space as student occupations of their universities, the activities of community squatting movements but also the imagining, planning and sometimes construction of architectural space. The latter, and its relationship to the politics of the late sixties, will be the concern of the final chapter.

Towards Socialism

In order to explore the foundations of this theoretical position it is necessary to consider the state of the debate in the few years prior to 1968. It has been noted in previous chapters that Perry Anderson acknowledged Hoggart's "dense, object invested universe"³ to be an all too accurate depiction of Britain's working class culture, a culture which he considered insular and patently lacking in the kind of worldview essential to an effective socialist movement. In 'Origins of the Present Crisis', published in 1964, Anderson had argued that a combination of forces in Britain in the 19th century had produced "a proletariat distinguished by an immovable corporate class consciousness and almost no hegemonic ideology," which would pursue "its own ends within a social totality whose overall determination [lay] outside it."⁴

The theme was continued by Anderson in an essay in 1965. 'Problems of Socialist Strategy,' contained in the collection *Towards Socialism*, edited by Anderson and Robin Blackburn, was a discussion of the predicament of Britain's absent socialist movement, in terms of inherited strategic inadequacies and structural weaknesses. 'Towards Socialism' was particularly concerned to outline the possible foundations of a future hegemonic strategy. The essay was

² In the *New Left Review* and an associated publication, *Student Power*, edited by Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn

³ Anderson 1992 p36

clearly 'New Left' in character and early in its development it both defined the prevailing strategic models - social democracy and orthodox communism - and repudiated them. Neither the orientation of social democracy towards a narrow, exclusively electoral policy, nor the Leninist strategy of a direct assault on the state could succeed in overcoming the power of the hegemonic class, Anderson declared, which was "diffused through the whole variegated, supple, intricate texture of civil society. It was the invisible colour of daily life itself."⁵

Anderson rejected both parliamentary and insurrectionary strategies in favour of a movement across the whole terrain of civil society, a position which owed a great deal to Gramsci's work, as yet unpublished in English. In Anderson's essay the need for a hegemonic socialist ideology was given paramount importance and was linked to the critical value of the intelligentsia. To regard the intelligentsia as an essential component in any revolutionary struggle was not necessarily an unorthodox position for a Marxist intellectual to take and in a later essay Anderson drew on Lenin's *What is to be Done?*, written in the wake of the failed 1905 revolution, to assert that "trade unions represent only the working class. A revolutionary movement – a party – requires more than this: it must include intellectuals and petty bourgeois who alone can provide the essential *theory* of socialism."⁶

The problem of working class insularity was compounded by the miserable inadequacy of Britain's intelligentsia, undeveloped in comparison to other European countries with little cohesion or consistency of ideas and ideology. Drawing from a 1962 survey by *New Society* of its own readership, Anderson observed a "desolate image of mediocrity, prejudice and confusion"⁷ amongst what should have been a representative sample of Britain's intellectuals. This was a group motivated by liberal conscience but who lacked a comprehensive understanding of the underlying social and political structure and who, consequently, expressed contradictory and philistine views.

⁴ Anderson 1992 p33

⁵ Anderson 1965 p239

⁶ Anderson 1965 p266

The role of the intelligentsia was clearly vital in the formation of a hegemonic socialist party in Anderson's estimation because it alone could introduce to the movement a socialist ideology: "another vision of the world."⁸ This was an argument based on Lenin's and Gramsci's discussions of the role of the revolutionary party and was substantiated through Anderson's continuing analysis of the exceptional character of Britain's historical development, initiated in his 1964 essay.

In the mid sixties, therefore, there is ample evidence that New Left theorists were promulgating an approach to politics which had rejected both social democratic and communist orthodoxy, in part on the basis of a critical re-reading of classical Marxism via Gramsci, in part through a long term assessment of British historical development. It is not evident in the work of a significant representative of the New Left such as Perry Anderson that there was much engagement with less orthodox ideas. There was an underlying recognition of the concept of alienation and the notion that industrialised societies had brought about the restructuring of the human personality. But except for a brief allusion in the 1965 essay to R.D. Laing and Marcuse, two prominent figures connected to the New Left who had countercultural and avant-garde associations, critical thought from outside of the canon of classical Marxism – Gramsci being a transitional figure in this respect – was not advocated. Prominently absent was any consideration of the intelligentsia's relationship to changes in the functioning of post-war capitalism, not in itself an unreasonable omission but indicative of the degree to which New Left thinking would change in the following two years.

Dialectics of Liberation

In 1967 four radical psychiatrists, all of whom had connections to both the New Left and the counterculture, had organised the Dialectics of Liberation Congress at London's Roundhouse. Amongst the speakers was Herbert Marcuse, an elder statesman of the pre-war European left-intelligentsia and a member of the Frankfurt School whose ideas concerning the militant tactics of the German

⁷ Anderson 1965 p271

student movement were to diverge sharply from Adorno's⁹ in the late sixties.¹⁰ Marcuse therefore had an intermediary role as an intellectual with historic connections to Western Marxism but whose ideas were also of significance in terms of the countercultural aspect of the New Left.

In his address to the Dialectics of Liberation Congress in London in 1967, Marcuse was emphatic in his insistence that socialism was not merely "the planned development of the productive forces, and the rationalisation of resources,"¹¹ but would involve a radical negation of established society, a total rupture which would be comparable to the practice adopted by the Paris communards of shooting at the clocks in an attempt to arrest the prevailing "established time continuum," reported by Walter Benjamin.¹² Marcuse took the view that revolutionary transformation would involve the emergence and activation of new needs, a negation of those "prevailing aggressive and repressive needs" which had "invaded even the deepest roots of individual existence, even the unconsciousness of man."¹³

If Anderson had recognised the same deep and existential aspects to socialist culture as Marcuse – "socialism is," he had stated, "a promulgation of freedom across the entire existential space of the world"¹⁴ – it wasn't fleshed out strategically. But with respect to their assessment of the role of the intelligentsia the differences between Marcuse and Anderson were more than mere emphasis. Of great significance in Marcuse's address in 1967 was the role given to the intelligentsia as an agent of liberation, in contrast to "those parts of the population" that had been "traditionally considered the agents of historical change."¹⁵ This was in part because of the greater importance of intellectual labour under conditions of late capitalism, because of the

⁸ Anderson 1965 p282

⁹ Adorno had been the leading member of the Frankfurt School and was particularly significant for developing theories of the 'culture industries' to explain the functioning of contemporary capitalism. See Jay 1973

¹⁰ See Marcuse – Adorno correspondence in *New Left Review* no233 January/February 1999

¹¹ Marcuse 1968 p184

¹² Marcuse 1968 p177

¹³ Marcuse 1968 p183

¹⁴ Anderson 1965 p289

¹⁵ Marcuse 1968 p182

“increasingly scientific character of the material process of production.”¹⁶ The intelligentsia would play a significant role, Marcuse argued, “as a socially necessary instrument, either of servitude or of liberation,”¹⁷ because it was “at the very source of the glaring contradictions between the liberating capacity of science and its repressive and enslaving use.”¹⁸ But because of the success of affluence in satisfying actual needs within advanced capitalist societies and through the manipulation and administration of these needs, systematically and on a huge scale, the consciousness and instincts of the mass of people had been “mutilated,” leaving the possibility of resistance in the hands of a minority of “still non-integrated social groups and among those who, by virtue of their privileged position, can pierce the ideological and material veil of mass communication and indoctrination – namely the intelligentsia.”¹⁹ In contrast to some theorists, Marcuse did not assert that the intelligentsia was the “new working class,” but it appeared to him to be the only social group capable of attacking advanced capitalism in its ‘affluent’ heartland.

Marcuse offered here a conception of the intelligentsia which went well beyond those formulations developed by Lenin and Gramsci, placing it at the functional centre of contemporary industrial capitalism. Marcuse’s Frankfurt School background provided him with a long established approach, emphasising the powerfully manipulative character of modern industrial capitalism, the incapacity of the general population to resist such manipulation, but also the potentially liberating role of a dissident intelligentsia. Anderson did not share this pessimistic attitude towards mass-culture and doubted that, for example, the communication industries could have an overwhelming impact on consciousness:

“It is often assumed that ... consciousness is formed today primarily by means of communication – press, radio, television, cinema, etc ... [but] the truth is that a man’s consciousness is formed by his *total life-situation*, the complete

¹⁶ Marcuse 1968 p188

¹⁷ Marcuse 1968 p188

¹⁸ Marcuse 1968 p188-89

¹⁹ Marcuse 1968 p187

continuum of his whole experience. Watching television or reading a newspaper is one moment in this, but not necessarily the most important.”²⁰

The role allotted to the intelligentsia by Marcuse was precisely because of its strategic position within the capitalist consciousness industries, institutions which for Anderson were only one place where the struggle against capitalist hegemony needed to be conducted. The particular qualities which the intelligentsia possessed and the relevance of these in struggles with the hegemonic class would be perceived differently in 1968, as a consequence of the changing perception of students in Britain. Anderson had a negative opinion of Britain’s intelligentsia in 1965, a judgement which he also applied to the student population. Anderson had reflected on the activities of students in Britain who, in contrast to the dynamic and progressive role played by this group elsewhere, remained “listless and conformist, showing only the feeblest flicker of interest in politics or society.”²¹

New kinds of radical synthesis

The changed perception of students in the few years following Anderson’s essay was partly a consequence of a new sensitivity to the cultural politics of generation. Alf Louvre describes the cultural politics of the sixties as characterised by: “new kinds of radical synthesis ... emphasising, amongst other things, the political significance of matters previously thought peripheral to the cause. The nuances of everyday style, lifestyle, language and taste were no longer merely as private or individual quirks, but as symptomatic, as telling indices of more general values and allegiances.”²²

Louvre is referring to the developing relationship between the New Left and the counterculture, a relationship which is more complex than many accounts suggest. It was argued in Chapter One that the New Left’s origins were in part an outcome of political changes associated with the post-war world order: America’s foreign policy and the debacles following the CPSU 20th Congress

²⁰ Anderson 1965 p245

²¹ Anderson 1965 p272

²² Louvre 1992 p45; See Chapter One

and the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 were fundamentally significant in the emergence of a left-wing alternative to social democracy's collusion with imperialism and the Soviet Union's authoritarian tendencies and lack of strategic vision. But it was also a consequence of social changes within the advanced capitalist countries which led to new sensibilities as well as new forms of analysis. In the USA this was exemplified in the SDS's *Port Huron* statement in 1962, a document which whilst criticising economic inequality and racism, and condemning American foreign policy, then went on to complain about the meaninglessness of work, and the "loneliness, estrangement [and] isolation" of American life.²³ In Britain, CND can be considered as one of the founding institutions of the New Left but in other respects as the first collective expression of countercultural ideas and lifestyles. Both the New Left and the counterculture were born at the same moment, from the same set of causes and had a symbiotic relationship, albeit a turbulent one with respect to pop culture.

In 1965 Bob Dylan had released *Highway 61 Revisited*, an album which roughly coincided with the scandalous events that July at the Newport Folk Festival when Dylan, to the horror of the folk movement purists, had played, and dressed, rock 'n' roll. The event marked a moment when mass-produced popular culture, habitually despised by the left, became connected to emerging political sensibilities; the kind of "radical synthesis" Louvre alludes to. Besides playing amplified music Dylan had compounded the crime by dressing 'like Elvis,' as disgusted folk fans observed.²⁴ Folk music was not simply a musical preference in the early sixties in the USA but was bound-up with the wider left political movement and therefore any deviation from a pure and purportedly authentic folk style was regarded as a political betrayal. With his rock band Dylan "made the most raucous sound he could: an electric noise that to many signified corruption and lies," according to Greil Marcus, but the significance of his clothing also went deep for the audience: "the folk singer who once dressed only in fraying cotton appeared onstage ... with an electric guitar in his hands [and] a high-style black leather jacket on his back.

²³ Berman 1997 p46-47

[A] 'sellout jacket'."²⁵ Henceforth the radical inflection of cultural expression would have a visual dimension in the forms of youth culture, albeit deeply contested.

The lifestyle signifiers of rebellious youth culture had become international currency by the late 1960s. In the aftermath of the May events in France Andre Glucksmann had become a member of a Maoist sect known as the Proletarian Left. Their politics were uncompromising and at one stage they had been involved in two kidnappings and had considered going underground,²⁶ but *Gauche Prolétarienne* were memorable for their cultural politics, employing a strategy of exemplary actions such as "expropriation of luxury food from a fashionable Paris shop, the invasion of millionaires' private property, [and] industrial sabotage."²⁷ And they had a familiar cultural style. According to Paul Berman "they had a swaggering air, half-brilliant and half-crazy, full of dash and combativeness, a style of leather jackets and alarming slogans, which is to say they were rebellious, thuggish, hostile, alluring. A familiar style in twentieth century Europe: a posture of extremism and violence, slightly dandified."²⁸

In Britain Mao and the Cultural Revolution was one of a number of sources from which an alternative lifestyle could be composed. David Glover notes in his discussion of the popularity of Moorcock, Burroughs and Tolkien in Britain in the sixties, that there existed an "extremely wide-ranging syncretism" within which "mythology, race relations, community experiments, India, Gandhi [and] William Blake" all converged as matters of concern to the Underground, "with no feeling of oddity at all. Tolkien and McLuhan rubbing shoulders with Marcuse and Mao."²⁹

In the USA there had been a continuing tension between the Old Left, for which the notion of 'living' the revolution was an irrelevancy, and New Left activism which made common ground with hippie rejection of middle class values. A

²⁴ Marcus 1997; Scaduto 1972

²⁵ Marcus 1997 xii

²⁶ Fraser 1988 p296

²⁷ Fraser 1988 p287

²⁸ Berman 1997 p267

symbolic moment of fusion between the New Left and the counterculture was during a sit-in at Berkeley in 1966 which ended “in the words of its own leadership, in a ‘mood of stoned euphoria’ and the singing of the ‘Yellow Submarine,’”³⁰ a bewildering spectacle for participating supporters of the traditional left. The following day the Berkeley resolution was distributed along with a picture of a Yellow Submarine and a cut-out Lone-Ranger mask to wear in class. Young remarked that “this might be ‘cultural revolution’, but certainly not along Chinese lines.”³¹

It has sometimes been argued that May 1968 represented the most significant revolutionary uprising since the October Revolution and that it provided a model upon which the revolutionary future of the advanced Western societies now depended.³² This claim might be explored in terms of the politics of space rather than the radical nature of the political programmes of 1968. The more pervasive challenge might have involved the regulation and ordering of space, challenges to conventional thought and behaviour which aimed to construct new situations and to reinvest everyday life with a new vitality.

The anti-Vietnam war demonstrations and the student occupations were not simply conventional protests but involved a particular way of occupying and using space. These protests, like the Aldermaston marches of the previous decade, were left wing in character but they also had a strong association with the counterculture. By the late 1960s the latter had acquired a particular visual style and a strong musical component in the form of rock music. There was an overlap in the dress style found on these demonstrations and that found at the late sixties pop festivals. The Isle of Wight festival (1970) at the end of the decade had similarities with these demonstrations and occupations, in part because both drew from a similar youth culture constituency and in part because of their use of space. The Isle of Wight festival will be remembered because of Jimi Hendrix’ final performance but also because of the confrontation between the organisers and a large contingent of participants over

²⁹ Glover 1984 p191

³⁰ Young 1977 p308

³¹ Young 1977p308

space, the latter's conflict with the police over drugs, and the response of the Isle of Wight's residents to the presence in their midst of a mass of people engaged in unconventional behaviour. If Grosvenor Square's politics had a cultural dimension the Isle of Wight festival was a cultural event which had, in some ways, become politicised.

Space was the medium through which transactions between politics and culture were realised during the 1960s but it will be suggested here that the ideas underlying this concept were pervasive and can be applied to a range of activities and events broadly associated with the New Left and its cultural allies. The transactions between the New Left and the counterculture might be understood in terms of the body in space. Susan McClary has observed of the orthodox left that it had "often tried to harness music and channel its energies toward pragmatic ends." The appropriation of "pseudo-folk styles" by the left implied an unmediated link with traditional roots, whilst reducing the actual effects of the music to a minimum:

"The political folk song is the left's version of the Calvinist hymn: words foregrounded to control 'the meaning,' music effaced to the status of vehicle, all untoward appeals to the body eliminated."³³

On the 29th April 1967, 'The 14 Hour Technicolor Dream' took place at the Alexandra Palace in London. This event, according to Mick Farren, brought together all of the elements that had been developing within the counterculture in the previous two years: "lights, sound effects, costumes... conceptual art, spatial structures like geodesic domes... every dope dealer in the Home Counties and beyond... and the obligatory Italian film crew."³⁴

The music was of course significant: Pink Floyd, the Soft Machine, the Crazy World of Arthur Brown, Graham Bond, Alexis Corner, the Pretty Things, the Move, Alex Harvey, Tomorrow, and Champion Jack Dupree all appeared on the

³² In the *New Left Review* special edition 1968/69

³³ McClary 1994 p31

³⁴ Farren 2001 p117

bill. Of greater significance was the way in which some of these 'performed'. Farren doesn't recall Pete Townsend playing any music but he does remember him "grooving around in ruffle shirt and paisley jacket."³⁵ The music was important to the counterculture but it was not, 'effaced' by lyrics or 'meaning', and operated within a different set of performative requirements than those observed by the orthodox left.

The anti-Vietnam war demonstration which converged on Grosvenor Square In October 1968 also involved a performative element distinct from earlier demonstrations. Many of the demonstrators wore construction hats or motorcycle crash helmets, glasses and earrings were removed and long hair was tied back and tucked into hats and helmets. The police refused to make eye contact with the demonstrators. Some demonstrators emulated a technique, first adopted by Japanese students, of linking arms and engaging in spurts of vigorous running, whilst chanting Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh !³⁶

These accounts suggest that New Left radicalism in the later sixties was primarily metropolitan, but there are accounts of events and situations in provincial Britain which suggest otherwise. Jo Stanley was a participant on the New Left and has discussed her initiation into political consciousness through her membership of YCND in the Liverpool suburb of Crosby in the early sixties. Stanley was to leave Liverpool to study and to work abroad for a time, then to return in the late sixties. The culture of Liverpool become enriched and was experienced in new ways, and its 'hipness' became more evident. This process whereby Liverpool acquired a new cultural identity occurred, however, through an intensification of its relationship to the rest of the world in ways which re-worked its provincial status, to the extent that:

"For this woman, 1960s Liverpool was a place that varyingly connected with the whole world of radical international politics; the project of liberation: of women, black people, prisoners, people suffering particular oppressions such as the

³⁵ Farren 2001 p117

³⁶ Farren 2001 p182; Farren, cited in Green 1998a p242

Greeks under the Junta; those of us who wanted an end to nuclear war; and those of us who wanted a more just and foresightful society: a socialist one”³⁷

In keeping with many comparable sixties moments, the radical project alluded to by Stanley combined orthodox political demands, some new political subjects but an important rendering of these objectives into new cultural forms. A central image, one which distinguishes absolutely the New Left from the old, was of the Friday night meetings where the members “sat cross-legged on the floor drinking Maxwell House coffee”³⁸ This might have happened because there were not enough chairs, but it can also be understood as the abandoning of previously hierarchical and rigid conventions in ways that brought to political activity a palpable sense of physical togetherness that came from youth culture. Such a scene was repeated in Paris and Berkeley to varying degrees of intensity.

One significant impact of countercultural practices was to make provincial life more, or seem more, cosmopolitan, to connect it to global struggles yet to somehow bring these struggles home. Of little interest to her was Britain’s home grown folk tradition exemplified by Ewan MacColl and which offered to her a particularly inappropriate cultural landscape:

“...the only role that folk culture seemed to offer to me as a northern girl, according to my reading of Ewan MacColl, was as a girl who was ‘kissed by a factory wall’ in a dirty old town (Salford)”³⁹

Stanley returned to Liverpool in 1968, aged 19. Now no longer living in Crosby but in Liverpool 8 which had become a “sort of Lancashire Haight-Ashbury.”⁴⁰ She shared flats with a number of “middle-class groover[s]”⁴¹ and through these became part of the wider world of student protest. Moving in these circles and bringing experiences with her from outside had the effect of intensifying

³⁷ Stanley 2001 p39

³⁸ Stanley 2001 p40

³⁹ Stanley 2001 p41

⁴⁰ Stanley 2001 p41

⁴¹ Stanley 2001 p41

Stanley's sense of Liverpool as a culturally and politically significant place, allowing her to mix global liberation politics with a new perception of the city's working class historical traditions.

In Stanley's account of Liverpool in the sixties cultural space was transformed, but not in the conventional sense of town planning or new architecture. Rather, space was appropriated, and in the process given new significance. A key moment is described:

"I remember seemingly thousands of us marching past the Catholic cathedral during a protest against the Springboks' rugby tour to the north..... it was agreed that the only way to truly have an effect on the public consciousness was to take our clothes off and walk down Renshaw Street, Bold Street, Lime Street, Church Street, into the very heart of town and even on to the Pier Head..... I was getting ready to pull off my purple velvet loons and remove my gold platform-soled boots when someone called it off."⁴²

Interesting in this account is the defamiliarisation of familiar places, the connection of Liverpool to global struggles and the typical countercultural attitude that a shocking display of nakedness in public might have a beneficial impact on consciousness – a reintegration of the political and the sensual within a single space.

1968 and student power

At the beginning of 1969 an issue of the *New Left Review* was published which was largely devoted to an analysis of the student upheavals of the previous year. The focus of this analysis appeared to be a comparison between Mao's strategy of guerrilla warfare involving the establishment of 'red bases' or liberated zones geographically inaccessible to the forces of repression, and the student 'insurgency' in Britain's universities. The comparison is easily ridiculed but less so if one takes the trouble to read the discussion thoroughly. The notion of the red base was one of a number of concepts employed in an attempt

⁴² Stanley 2001 p42

to explain the significant role of the students, along with the concept of the over-determined contradiction theorised by Althusser, a consideration of the nature of generational rebellion, and deliberations on the position of students within “the complex structures of late capitalism.”⁴³ The key concept which might be taken to embrace these different theoretical approaches is that of *sociological inaccessibility*, the idea that the insubordination of youth culture combined with the strategic importance of universities in advanced industrial societies gave students a decisive role at this moment, one which made them inaccessible to forms of incorporation and repression perpetrated by the hegemonic class.

In 1968 and the months following there was a rapid reassessment of the political possibilities of students in Britain, partially grounded in the apparently volatile conjuncture of political radicalism and generational lifestyle which the counterculture seemed to represent. Stedman Jones concurred with Anderson’s earlier appraisal of the relatively backward nature of Britain’s intellectual and political culture and was dismissive of CND as a “comparatively lethargic reaction of British youth to the dramatic transformation of international political conflict in the sixties,”⁴⁴ in comparison to the SDS in Berlin or the Provos in Amsterdam. This was an assessment based largely on the programme of CND and what Stedman Jones regarded as its essentially liberal character, originating in such earlier movements as the Campaign Against the Boer War. CND demonstrated “great idealism, intellectual confusion, and a virtual absence of strategy and tactics.”⁴⁵ As student militancy became prevalent in other parts of the world in the 1960s the passivity and non-violence of CND appeared to Stedman Jones as a retarding influence, its protests “only likely to be smothered by the ‘repressive tolerance’ of advanced capitalism.” However, “the Grosvenor Square demonstrations ... marked the opening of a new phase in British student politics.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Wilcox 1969 p26

⁴⁴ Stedman Jones 1969 p43

⁴⁵ Stedman Jones 1969 p44

⁴⁶ Stedman Jones 1969 p44

Vietnam, protest and space

Early in 1965 the USA had escalated its military presence in Vietnam, sending combat troops to the South, beginning saturation bombing of the North and, at home a few months later, doubling the draft. In Britain the initial response to the escalating war had been expressed in criticism of the Labour Government's failure to condemn America's actions, but, it has been argued, the reason why Vietnam was such a "potent" and "radicalising" element was that it "acted as a prism through which the flaws of Western societies suddenly stood out in sharp relief."⁴⁷ Ronald Fraser suggested that the support for the Vietnamese struggle against American imperialism in countries such as Britain, was amongst "those seeking radical solutions beyond the confines of traditional left politics in the West."⁴⁸

One of the obvious events connecting the New Left with the counterculture had been the Aldermaston marches of the late 1950s. CND's leadership may have been eminently respectable, but the popular image of CND was of beatnik protest, an image which might have alienated the press but which generated new forms of support. Many more young Britons supported CND than those who went on the marches, and a significant form of support was to identify with the style of the mythical CND beatnik activist. Thus, before opposition to the war in Vietnam became the focal point of a fusion between the New Left and the counterculture in Britain, there were other precedents.

In the aftermath of the demise of CND there had emerged a number of political causes in Britain which motivated student action. The refusal of the government to intervene, following Rhodesia's UDI in November 1965 had incensed many and, in early 1967, 100,000 students took part in protests against the raising of overseas students' fees.⁴⁹ By the end of 1966, according to Jack Straw: "disillusionment with the Labour government was so great that you didn't label yourself a Labour Party man," although Straw continued to pay his subscriptions, "one of the few who did" he claimed."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Fraser 1988 p89

⁴⁸ Fraser 1988 p89

⁴⁹ Fraser 1988 p109

Fraser argues that In the wake of the USA's escalation of war, many tens of thousands of students were radicalised throughout the world, but the particular forms this radicalisation subsequently took were specific to local conditions. In the USA itself students faced the draft and were aware of the direct involvement of American universities in military related research, but elsewhere there was the "symbolic comparison of an authoritarian university regime to US domination of a small country."⁵¹ The initial cause of Britain's first occupation, at the LSE in March 1967, had been a protest at the appointment of a director who had been the principal of University College, Rhodesia, although the immediate cause of the occupation was the University's suspension of two student leaders who defied the ban on a protest meeting.⁵²

In one respect, however, the Grosvenor Square demonstrations of 1968 were indicative of a qualitative change in the perception of radicalism. Nick Cohn's nearly contemporary account of sixties fashion noted that sartorial style was a significant aspect of the New Left's presence on the streets in 1968. Tariq Ali's *Street Fighting Years*, begins with a rather stern disclaimer: "This book is a political memoir. It is not, be warned, an account of mini-skirts on the steps of the Sorbonne."⁵³ Nevertheless, Ali's book is suffused with popular cultural references, as the title itself would indicate. In fact, due to the activities of the state, pop culture had been fleetingly politicised in late sixties Britain. In June 1967, Mick Jagger and others were briefly imprisoned for drug offences, the culmination of a sharp increase in arrests for possession in the previous twelve months, an hysterical media campaign, and the apparent determination of some sections of the establishment to 'nail' prominent representatives of the youth culture.⁵⁴ There was, in fact, no consensus on the wisdom of such a course of action, William Rees-Mogg's well-known *Times* editorial in July 1967⁵⁵ illustrating what Marwick has argued to be the establishment's preference for

⁵⁰ Fraser 1988 p109

⁵¹ Fraser 1988 p5

⁵² Fraser 1988 p112

⁵³ Ali 1987 Pvii

⁵⁴ Green cites Tom Driberg's claim that Arnold Goodman had gone to the DPP and insisted that Jagger be prosecuted. Green 1998b pp175-76

⁵⁵ Rees Mogg 1967

the exercise of 'measured judgement.'⁵⁶ Nevertheless, there was a perception that the victimisation of drug users was one component in a long frontal assault which stretched so far as to embrace the imperialist war in Vietnam. Mick Jagger was prepared to accept the symbolic role given to him and had supported the VSC's demonstration against the war in Vietnam in October 1968 by giving to *Black Dwarf* – a magazine initiated by Tariq Ali, amongst others - a hand-written copy of his lyrics to 'Street Fighting Man,' published by the magazine in facsimile form ⁵⁷ alongside of an essay by Fredrick Engels on street fighting as a revolutionary tactic. Generational and pop culture, of a certain type, became entwined in 1968 with radical politics.

Stedman Jones was extremely positive with respect to the generational aspect of the upsurge of student militancy in Britain. What had occurred was, he argued:

"a moral and aesthetic upheaval which has transformed the life-styles of youth. Its most prominent characteristics have been the sudden creative liberation of popular music, the diversification of dress, the switch from literary to visual awareness and the decisive rejection of all that was traditionally associated with British sexual Puritanism."⁵⁸

Stedman Jones regarded this transformation as one initiated by working class youth which was then appropriated by militant students, arguing that "the recent changes in mores has forced apart generations in a way that creates the preconditions for an upsurge of properly political radicalism."⁵⁹

But were there self-evident connections between working class youth culture and that practiced by the predominantly middle class student population, and in what ways did generational culture facilitate new forms of radical political engagement? In order to address these questions we can briefly reiterate some

⁵⁶ This concept is Marwick's positive version of Marcuse's 'repressive tolerance.' See Marwick 1998 p13

⁵⁷ Jagger 1968

⁵⁸ Stedman Jones 1969 p43

⁵⁹ Stedman Jones 1969 p45

of the themes from earlier chapters in which popular culture was defended by revisionists such as Reyner Banham against the cultural criticism of critics such as Richard Hoggart. The defence of mass-produced popular culture was on the basis of a selective procedure using criteria drawn from the European avant-garde. By 1968 rock music and fashion were powerful examples of the ways in which this alliance between mass-produced popular culture and the avant-garde had been achieved, but these cultural forms now tended to comply with the tastes and sensibilities of their principal consumers, the New Left intelligentsia, a group with strong links to the progressive middle class.

In 'Skins Rule', Pete Fowler looked back on the popular music scene in Britain during the crucial years from 1963 to 1966 and noted a unified youth culture:

"There were no real schisms; the concerts given by the Stones in London in '63 and '64 at places like Ken Colyer's Studio 51 and the 100 Club were attended by students from London University, spivs from Soho, and kids up for the day from the council estates in the suburbs. As the old sign used to read, 'even GOD digs the Stones.'"⁶⁰

This was all to change after 1967 as those pop groups associated with the Mods achieved transatlantic success and as Rock music's audience became more middle class. As a Birmingham apprentice reported to Fowler:

"I was 15 in '67, and all I remember is what a drag it all was. One minute we had the Spencer Davis Group playing here, and the Stones played here a lot, and the Yardbirds and the Animals. Then suddenly – nothing. Nothing at all. I hated fucking Sergeant Pepper and that thing the Stones did with 'She's A Rainbow' on it. Me and my mates spent most of the time in the pub after that. I mean, you could hardly dance to the Pink Floyd, could you?"⁶¹

In the early 1960s there had been much commentary suggesting that youth culture was classless. New Left protest culture had not argued this but it had

⁶⁰ Fowler 1972 p11

viewed working class subculture as potentially radical in character, although a radicalism different to the typical concerns of socialists and the labour movement.⁶² By the late 1960s, class divisions within culture appeared more evident and Murdock and McCron have argued that “it was pop music which provided one of the main means through which this basic class division was expressed and confirmed.”⁶³ The sixties alliance between the progressive intelligentsia and mass-produced pop, in the form of rock music, looks remarkable when viewed against earlier dismissals of mass culture. But a closer examination reveals that this appropriation of one form of popular culture may have simultaneously transformed it, more to meet the needs of intellectuals.

Such assessments of the relationship of popular music to the progressive intelligentsia in the wake of 1968 would come later, however. Following the events of 1968, the New Left began a reassessment of student militancy in Britain. Gareth Stedman Jones noted important changes to the structure of Britain’s higher education system in the period after 1954. Total numbers of students in Britain had never exceeded 70,000 before the war but in the period 1954-55 these rose to 122,000, rising in 1962-63 to 216,000, and rising in 1965-66 to over 300,000. Whilst a minority of these were from working class backgrounds (roughly 25%), absolute numbers from this latter group increased, nevertheless, and as a proportion of their age group students in higher education constituted 11% in 1967 in comparison to 2.7% before the War.⁶⁴ So numbers of working class students increased over a 10 year period whilst at the same time the student as a recognisable social type became more pervasive.

There were a number of factors which made the situation of students in Britain different to that of France, Germany and the U.S.A. Educational expansion in Britain was not of the same scale as that in most other industrial countries. Although numbers of students in Britain increased, this increase was nothing like that in France, which had almost 600,000 students, double those of Britain,

⁶¹ Fowler 1972 pp17-18

⁶² See: Bentley 2005; Hall 1959; Hall 1960; discussion in Chapter One

⁶³ Murdock and McCron 1976 p23

in 1968⁶⁵ and, furthermore, there was not a proportionate increase in public expenditure which was particularly significant for those studying in art schools or technical and teacher training colleges. The physical infrastructure which accommodated the increased numbers was strained. Of significant interest to New Left thinkers was the way in which higher education in the sixties in Britain reflected the considerable tensions between archaism and modernity. Traditionally the image of the “undergraduate” was reserved for a privileged minority attending Oxbridge colleges, later imitated in a “shabby but sedulous” form in the provincial universities. In this image the university was represented as a “community of gentlemen well versed in the arts of civilization.... Freed from prejudice by the tranquil ceremonies of Socratic debate. Comfortably housed, well-fed, sometimes even waited on by feudal retainers.”⁶⁶ In contrast, the vast majority of those studying in colleges of education, art schools and technical colleges enjoyed none of the privileges of a liberal education and were condemned to “the bleak waste land of a cheap and grindingly utilitarian higher education.”⁶⁷ The reality of this situation was vividly represented in the student occupation of the Hornsey College of Art in May 1968. Tom Nairn wrote in his introduction to *The Hornsey Affair* - a record of the event written by staff and students - of the college “squeezed into crumbling old schools and tottering sheds miles apart, making do with society’s cast-offs like a colony of refugees.”⁶⁸ The situation in British higher education was not simply that of the pressure of increasing numbers on an unmodernised physical infrastructure, therefore, but of the reproduction of class privilege and inequality; the persistence of forms of archaism which were comparable to other national institutions; and as a location where alienation was experienced acutely.

This was not, therefore, simply an increase in numbers but a radical restructuring of the higher educational landscape. Because modernisation of higher education had been more rapid and more pronounced in France, the transformation was subjected to some novel interpretations. Stedman Jones

⁶⁴ Stedman-Jones 1969 pp40-41

⁶⁵ Halliday 1969 p317

⁶⁶ Stedman Jones 1969 p42

⁶⁷ Stedman Jones 1969 p42

⁶⁸ Nairn 1969 p15

noted that theories of post-industrial society promoted the notion that “universities and colleges today are no longer primarily concerned with the transmission of a cultural heritage, but are fast becoming a central element of the ‘forces of production.’ ” Such theories were associated with Alain Touraine, a sociologist at Nanterre in the early sixties who had compared the campus, which had been established in an outer suburb of Paris in order to accommodate the modernising French state’s need for graduates, to the company towns of the industrial revolution. The huge significance of intellectual labour within the post-war economy and the devastating impact of mass-production methods in higher education led Touraine to compare early student revolts “with the reaction of the traditional poor in the nineteenth century to the first impact of industrialisation.” It was an emotional and “expressive” response rather than “instrumental” and strategically mature but it foreshadowed “qualitatively new forms of social conflict engendered by a new form of social domination.”⁶⁹ Stedman Jones’ discussion of Touraine’s theory of the new proletariat ultimately dismissed it as “scientifically incorrect and politically reactionary,” as he did those opposing views which regarded students as overwhelmingly bourgeois or petit bourgeois, as ultimately a “trivial or reactionary force” and which regarded student militancy as “a diversion from the true struggle, which is located on the factory floor.”⁷⁰

In contrast to Touraine’s theory of the new proletariat on the one hand and *ouvrierism* on the other, Stedman Jones developed an explanation of the student revolt drawn from Althusser’s concept of the ‘overdetermined contradiction’. The Leninist theory of the ‘weakest link’ had been employed by Althusser in his essay ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’, in order to overcome the simplifications of the Hegelian dialectic. Althusser hypothesized that numerous points of rupture within the social formation, whilst governed in the final instance by the contradiction embodied in the clash between antagonistic class forces had, nevertheless, their own regional consistency. Although there was “a hierarchy of dominance and subordination in any particular conjuncture, a multiplicity of real and effective contradictions (co)exist

⁶⁹ Stedman-Jones 1969 pp26-27

throughout the regions of the social formation, permeating it.”⁷¹ In the event of a generalised revolutionary rupture the various points of antagonism within the social formation might fuse but would not be dissolved into a condition of internal unity and would remain effective in accordance with “the specific modalities of their action... determining, but also determined in one and the same movement.”⁷² Stedman Jones argued that: “to maintain, therefore, that the most explosive contradiction of advanced capitalism may at certain specific historical moments reside in the university” was not to suggest that students had now replaced the working class as the principal agent of revolutionary change but that: “although the determinant contradiction in a capitalist society in the last instance is always between capital and labour, it is still possible that the dominant contradiction at any given moment of time will lie elsewhere.”⁷³ And “mass student insurgency is *par excellence* an ‘overdetermined’ phenomenon,”⁷⁴ Stedman Jones maintained.

In response to what was seen as an excessively ‘economistic’ strategy associated with orthodox communism, Althusser’s conceptual framework was adopted in order to develop a less mechanistic approach to revolutionary change. But these ideas were also linked to the practical example of the Chinese revolution and the concept of the red base. One of the objectives that can be discerned in *Student Power* was to create a bridge between one example of an overdetermined contradiction at work – red bases in the Chinese revolution – and another, the political forms of the student insurgency. The Chinese revolution had occurred on the basis of a protracted guerrilla war within which liberated zones of popular power were established, transformations which preceded the full consummation of the revolution within the national context. The question this posed was that if “the guerrilla’s liberated zone [was] initially located in those areas which are *geographically* inaccessible to the repressive forces of the established order” then did not “the complex structures of late capitalism... contain areas, *sociologically* inaccessible to the repressive forces

⁷⁰ Stedman-Jones 1969 p29

⁷¹ Elliott 1987 p149

⁷² Althusser 1979 p101

⁷³ Stedman Jones 1969 p28

⁷⁴ Stedman Jones 1969 p30

of the ruling class, which can become growing points of revolutionary power?"⁷⁵ This is an interesting formulation which effectively applied the idea of the red base to circumstances of advanced capitalism. The space of the university could be liberated, but this was because of the sociological characteristics of its inhabitants and their relationship to contemporary capitalism, which was one in which the functional necessity of large quantities of intellectual labour was evident.

The use of Althusser and the concept of the red base allowed the contributors to *New Left Review* to theorise a significant role for student militancy without discarding the principle enshrined in classical Marxism, that the fundamental contradiction in bourgeois society was embedded in the clash of antagonistic class forces. It would, however, be a misreading of these texts to suggest either that there was an intention to emulate the Chinese experience, or that their principal theoretical source was Althusser. Students were also seen to have a particular importance due to the structural requirements of late capitalism, insights which owed nothing to Althusser or Mao but had their origins in Marcuse, Lefebvre, and Debord, theorists of a very different Marxism whose ideas had some presence within the counterculture.

Writing about working class youth culture, in 1976, John Clarke and Tony Jefferson noted of contemporary capitalism that there had been a:

"shift from product-oriented to market-oriented industry in an effort constantly to realise the surplus-value of the product by ensuring that it is constantly and fully consumed – an attempt to overcome the recurrent possibility of over-production. Thus the increased employment of sophisticated market research techniques and mass-advertising are intimately connected to the need to ensure the matching of demand to production. Related to this is the continual effort to exploit existing markets more fully and to develop new needs, and new markets for new products, to maintain and increase profitability."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Wilcox 1969 p26

The shift to consumer capitalism which Clarke and Jefferson considered to be a significant factor in the development of British working class youth culture was discussed by Ernest Mandel in his 1972 book, *Late Capitalism*, and later by Fredric Jameson who attempted to link it to the emergence of post-modern culture.⁷⁷ Significant political responses to late capitalism were during the events of 1968 and the debates which preceded and followed them.

The emerging concept of consumer capitalism is a significant one in the book, *Student Power*,⁷⁸ which tends towards a view of students as functioning within a qualitatively transformed environment. We have seen that Marcuse's notion of the role of the intelligentsia was grounded in assumptions concerning the increasing predominance of consumer capitalism, but the late sixties New Left turned also to other theorists. In his introduction to *Student Power*, Alexander Cockburn argued that the mode of consumption in late capitalist society was in the form of a "dizzying succession of spectacles" within which individual commodities were fused together into lifestyles, the production of which required a vast infrastructure of "technicians and manipulators" such as "television producers, fashion consultants, show business personalities, gossip columnists, public relations officers, press departments, etc,"⁷⁹ whose function was to condition the citizen in the role of passive consumer. Cockburn cited Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* as the source of these insights but they could equally have been derived from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*. In one recent characterisation of Debord's formulation the spectacle was defined as an attempt to conceptualise:

"the submission of more and more facets of human sociability – areas of everyday life, forms of recreation, patterns of speech, idioms of local solidarity, kinds of ethical or aesthetic insubordination, the endless capacities of human beings to evade or refuse the orders brought down to them from high – to the deadly solicitations (the lifeless sameness) of the market."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Clarke and Jefferson 1976 p139

⁷⁷ Jameson 1992; See also Baran and Sweezy 1968

⁷⁸ Cockburn and Blackburn 1969

⁷⁹ Cockburn 1969 p10

⁸⁰ 'Retort' 2004 p8

Whilst one tendency had been to relate the expansion of intellectual labour to the growth of the productive forces, Stedman Jones cautioned against such a simplification. Mandel had written in an early edition of *Black Dwarf* of the “colossal transformation of the productive forces” and “the reintegration of intellectual labour into productive labour.”⁸¹ Similarly, Glucksmann had seen the May events in France as a “revolt of the ensemble of productive forces against the relations of production,”⁸² but for Stedman Jones these were not dialectical formulations. It was correct that advanced industrial societies had an “imperative need for large numbers of highly trained professional and technical cadres”⁸³ but alongside the requirement for intellectually skilled manpower employed as “technicians of production” there was an indispensable need for “technicians of consumption.”⁸⁴

Stedman Jones argued that the growth of the forces of production involved a transformation of the relations of production to ensure that “consumption assumes the forms and dimensions which are necessary for the system... Their task is to ensure the obedience and conformity of the masses in the supermarket and the living room as well as the workplace.”⁸⁵ Alongside these categories of intellectual labour was that of the “technicians of consent” the function of which was to indoctrinate “the population with the values of the capitalist consensus.”⁸⁶

Stedman Jones’s account represents a decisive shift away from a view of capitalism which would see it as functioning largely through the exercise of economic power in the industrial workplace. Capitalism was implicated in a massive expansion of the apparatus of consumption, one of the consequences of which was to give various forms of intellectual labour a strategic importance, and this was particularly significant with respect to the students whose social

⁸¹ Stedman Jones 1969 p31. Citation from Mandel in *Black Dwarf* issue2 1968

⁸² Stedman Jones 1969 p31. Citation from Glucksmann in *New Left Review* 52 November/December 1968

⁸³ Stedman Jones 1969 p30

⁸⁴ Stedman Jones 1969 p31

⁸⁵ Stedman Jones 1969 p31

⁸⁶ Stedman Jones 1969 p31

function was to provide operatives within this apparatus. But although Stedman Jones regards the students as subjected to intolerable and contradictory pressures, which therefore gave them a radical potential, none of this dialectical thinking was applied to the ordinary consumer, now condemned to “obedience and conformity” as a consequence of their enslavement to consumerism. The New Left had developed considerably in the course of the sixties but it was still attached to attitudes towards mass culture established in an earlier period. That contributors to Student Power demonstrated none of this hostility to the consumption of rock music, or certain forms of fashion and mass design, is indicative of the prevailing attitude that had emerged on the left after Hoggart, which embraced selective forms of popular culture in an avant-garde fashion.⁸⁷

In other respects, though, the debates about the significance of student militancy, in the *New Left Review* and associated publications in early 1969, was an innovative response to the perception of new circumstances. The great bulk of the analysis in these publications was concerned with the specificities of socialist struggles within advanced capitalism and whilst Mao and Althusser facilitated a break from mechanistic and economistic theory, it was the theorists of late capitalism who provided the resources for an alternative strategy. The *New Left Review* would increasingly come under the influence of Trotskyism in the period after 1968, but this was a moment when a connection between political radicalism as conventionally regarded and a politics of the personal within the new conditions of consumer capitalism was considered.

Whilst the New Left was developing an innovative response to the changed character of capitalism, there was to be an uneven development of the politics of the personal in the course of the 1960s. The New Left did not engage with Feminism to any extent until the end of the decade. According to Lynne Segal, this was, in the early years of the New Left, partly because of the influence of the ‘Angry Young Man’ on radical culture:

⁸⁷ See Melzer 1970

“Women and domesticity were seen as the arch-enemy of the freedom-loving anarchic young working class rebel of the day. Men of the New Left identified strongly with the tough, amoral, cynical, invariably misogynist heroes of Allan Sillitoe, John Osborne and others.”⁸⁸

As the decade progressed the influence of such a negative model diminished but the counterculture was not noted for its progressive attitude towards female participants. Jeff Nuttall’s opinion of Feminism was that it was “a major element in the enfeeblement of a cultural movement that might have succeeded.

[Feminists] were very much people who dismantled the main drive – which was erotic and creative – from within.”⁸⁹ According to David Widgery, women did a lot of work on the underground press, providing ideas “not just providing heaps of brown rice,” but they tended to remain in the background, and it was the same on the student left: “men talked and women did the background work.”⁹⁰

There was also a clear spatial dimension to women’s activities in the New Left, therefore; women occupying the background whilst men performed in the foreground. According to Sheila Benson, women were silent or silenced at large *public* meetings because they found the size of such gatherings daunting and because “male comrades competed to say their piece in such numbers that the chair had difficulty in fitting in all those who indicated a readiness to speak,” and male speakers adopted “a style of haranguing speaker and audience” that most women felt uncomfortable with. So, Benson states: “we reserved discussion of issues for smaller, informal groups.”⁹¹

The Anti-Institution

In the months following the events of 1968 there had been a significant debate about the role of the students which had attempted to place their actions within a theoretical and strategically viable context. Althusser, Mao, Marcuse, Lefebvre and Debord – very different sources – were mobilised in this cause. The theoretical approach discussed within *the New Left Review* in 1969 was

⁸⁸ Segal 1989 p115

⁸⁹ Jeff Nuttall, cited in Green 1998 p403

⁹⁰ David Widgery cited in Green 1998 p405

most precise, but comparable if less meticulous formulations could also be found in the debates around architecture and psychiatry in the late sixties which placed greater emphasis on the psychological characteristics of the liberated zone.

In *The Death of the Family*, David Cooper had posed the following question: “What is the difference between the mental hospital and the university; why cannot universities become mental hospitals and why cannot mental hospitals become universities?”⁹² Cooper, R.D. Laing and Joseph Berke and Leon Redler had been the organisers of the Dialectics of Liberation Congress in 1967. As well as leading figures in the anti-psychiatry movement, Cooper and Laing had established connections to the New Left, Laing having contributed to *Sanity*, the journal of CND, and both had written for the *New Left Review*. As outlandish as it may seem, the connection made by Cooper between the university and the mental hospital was not an unreasonable one in the context.

Marcuse’s politics of alienation was premised on the idea that those who had managed to retain some autonomy against the onslaught of affluence, who had “an intellectual revulsion against the values of ... affluence”⁹³ could be the catalyst for a liberation movement. Marcuse was impressed by the hippies, primarily with respect to such tendencies as the Diggers and Provos, for their “instinctual revulsion against the values of the affluent society” and for the way in which “sexual, moral and political rebellion are somehow united” in their lifestyles.⁹⁴ The reductive and economistic aspects of communist and social democratic orthodoxy were generally rejected by the New Left and this was the case with Marcuse. The need to achieve liberation from an affluent society did not indicate a new or refined *means* to bring about revolutionary change but was a redefinition of the *ends* of revolution, in Marcuse’s work. In contrast to the impoverished narrowness of earlier orthodoxies, Marcuse offered a vision of a society in which a “depth dimension of human existence” would be activated.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Benson 1989 p109

⁹² Cooper 1971 p62

⁹³ Marcuse 1968 p190

⁹⁴ Marcuse 1968 p190

⁹⁵ Marcuse 1968 p183

From such a perspective the liberation of the university by its students would be a qualitative transformation, attending to the numerous ways in which advanced capitalism had profoundly restructured the human personality to its detriment. At its crudest, such a depth analysis of the workings of capitalism made no distinction between the American war against the Vietcong and the functioning of the bourgeois family, one repressive institution being equivalent to any other. According to Cooper, what characterised both universities and mental hospitals was their exercise of authority over their inmates, their fear of “sexuality and, for that matter, of the reality of human relationships in any form,”⁹⁶ and their capacity to distribute “tranquillizers in every conceivable form, everything from the right pill for the right patient to the right job for the right graduate.”⁹⁷ The anti-hospital, by contrast, denied the legitimacy of those boundaries and types of authority which kept inmates in their place, favouring instead a therapeutic community in which psychiatrist and patients cured each other.

What the *New Left Review* had defined as red bases – spaces which were resistant to assault from the hegemonic power, not because of their superior military defences but because of their sociological characteristics – had similarities with the anti-hospital. In fact the anti-institution could be constructed as an alternative to a range of different institutional spaces and Cooper had also been instrumental in establishing the Anti-University in London, an institution which sought to destroy such categories as ‘student’, ‘teacher’ and ‘course’. These anti-institutions are easily ridiculed. Jeff Nuttall was scathing of the Anti-University, describing it as a “dosshouse” descended on by “people with bed-rolls on their backs always wanting a place to doss down.”⁹⁸ They were, nevertheless, practical embodiments of a principle about which Anderson had been emphatic some years before: namely, that alienation was not simply a psychological state, if this were taken to mean a private, personal, individual matter, and that there was no clear distinction between ‘society’ and the

⁹⁶ Cooper 1971 p63

⁹⁷ Cooper 1971 p63

⁹⁸ Jeff Nuttall, cited in Green 1998 p239

‘individual’: “persons and institutions” were not “closed, demarcated beings, with fixed boundaries between them.”⁹⁹

Anti-institutions, whilst exemplified in formally established projects such as the Anti-University, can also be considered as temporary and spontaneous arrangements, such as the activities of the London Street Commune which squatted 144 Piccadilly, a large unoccupied mansion, in September 1969, under the spray-painted slogan: “We are the writing on your walls.”¹⁰⁰ These were spectacular events, more designed to provoke the authorities than to provide immediate housing for the homeless, but as, albeit temporary, exercises in anti-institutional living, in which political and personal matters were inextricably entwined, they are also comparable to the student occupations of the late 1960s.

Some students participating in the occupations of the LSE between 1966 and 1969 regarded the experience as having provided an intensity and immediacy not available under normal circumstances. One reported that the LSE occupation was her only “valid” experience whilst studying¹⁰¹ and another considered it to be “the most beautiful experience of his life.”¹⁰² Similar responses could be observed from participants on the VSC demonstrations in 1968. Fraser reports Rachel Dyne, an LSE student at the time, as remembering the October 17th demonstration as “one of the happiest moments of my life. We took over the whole street as though we could do what we liked, it echoed to the chanting. I felt we were a real force, part of an international movement that could change the course of events on a worldwide scale.”¹⁰³

Colin Crouch’s *The Student Revolt* is an account of student unrest at the LSE during this period, an important theme within being to suggest that for many participants the emotional and spiritual dimension of the event and the experience of community were more important than any tangible political

⁹⁹ Anderson 1965 p288

¹⁰⁰ Hewison 1986 p165

¹⁰¹ Crouch 1970 p57

¹⁰² Crouch 1970 p58

¹⁰³ Fraser 1988 p160-161

objectives. Crouch's observations of the ways in which the spatial configurations of the building generated particular responses tend to support some of Bernstein's assertions concerning class and space. Some of Crouch's observations are anecdotal and trivial, such as the deletion of the floor numbers to indicate a rejection of hierarchy, and the removal of male and female signs on the toilets.¹⁰⁴

A more substantial example was the protracted conflict concerning the 'gates' at the LSE in 1969. The gates had been erected at strategic points throughout the School because of its increased activities in hiring its facilities to outsiders for conferences and other events, allowing some parts of the building to be open whilst others remained closed. The gates were not necessarily conceived of as a means of maintaining public order, therefore, but the response of the students suggested otherwise. Removal of the gates became one of the students' most persistent demands: Robin Blackburn, a lecturer at the LSE, later to be dismissed, described the gates as: "the material expression of class oppression";¹⁰⁵ Nicholas Bateson, also a staff member who was dismissed said that "tearing down the gates was required of us if we were to show proper solidarity with the Africans in Rhodesia, the guerrillas in Thailand and the Arabs in Palestine."¹⁰⁶

Crouch believed that the University's explanation for the presence of the gates was a reasonable one and looked for a motivation for this particular form of student protest. How could a localised conflict, apparently ordinary and trivial in character, become invested with the significance given to it by Blackburn and Bateson? The New Left's deeply felt solidarity with the Vietcong's Guerrilla war in Vietnam and the Cultural Revolution in China was, Crouch suggests, because these struggles were participatory and thorough-going in their attempt to transform everyday life, and were therefore regarded as distinct from and superior to Soviet communism.¹⁰⁷ Such an explanation emphasised the hostility

¹⁰⁴ See Bernstein 1975 and his discussion of the progressive middle class toilet, discussed earlier

¹⁰⁵ The quotation is a paraphrase by Crouch 1970 p84-85

¹⁰⁶ The quotation is a paraphrase by Crouch 1970 p84-85

¹⁰⁷ Crouch 1970 pp24-25

of the New Left to bureaucracy, and its favouring of spontaneous, grass roots and decentralised movements and struggles, a series of preferences indicated by Young, also, in his typology of the distinctions between the New Left and the Old Left.¹⁰⁸

The red base, the anti-institution and other such alternative spaces may appear superficially as wild, eccentric concepts which were produced in the heady moment of 1968, hardly to be taken seriously subsequently. In Tariq Ali's *Street Fighting Years*, for example, there is no critical engagement with these concepts. Ali describes the scope of student unrest and remarks that "Student Power" had become a rallying cry throughout the country, then stating that: "the necessity to transform the bourgeois universities into a 'red base' was theorised by Robin Blackburn in the *New Left Review* and a Penguin book edited by him and Alexander Cockburn, enticingly entitled *Student Power*, sold tens of thousands of copies at the time."¹⁰⁹ The debate in *New Left Review* and the publication, *Student Power* were more serious in their concerns than Ali's comment suggests, however.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this chapter has been to examine the New left during, and in the lead up to, 1968, in terms of space. It was observed that Perry Anderson's essays in the mid 1960s were grounded in certain spatial assumptions. Anderson considered that one of the problems for the development of an hegemonic strategy in Britain was, on the one hand, the insularity of the British working class, a condition he described in terms of Hoggart's "dense, object invested universe;"¹¹⁰ on the other hand, the intelligentsia was described in terms similar to those used by Hoggart for the upwardly mobile, occupying the margins of working class and lower middle class life.

¹⁰⁸ Young 1977 p310

¹⁰⁹ Ali 1987 p218

¹¹⁰ Anderson 1992 p36

In the course of the 1960s, New Left politics became engaged with forms of cultural politics “previously thought peripheral to the cause,”¹¹¹ such as lifestyle, language and taste, and the social group most engaged with this politics was the intelligentsia. This intelligentsia had now become invested with characteristics very different to those observed by Anderson in 1965.

One key moment in this changing perception was the Dialectics of Liberation Congress in 1967, when elements of the New Left and the counterculture came together. Marcuse had been a key speaker at this event and had argued that the intelligentsia now occupied a vital role within the struggle for socialism, because of its strategic position within new forms of capitalist production, the communications industries in particular. Marcuse did not consider that the working class had the capacity to lead such a struggle. In his 1967 address, Marcuse had conceived of the radical negation of existing society in terms of an alternative spatialisation. Marcuse’s description of the character of a liberated society, whilst emphatic regarding the necessity of a deeply personal liberation which would release “human sensibility and sensitivity,” also insisted that such qualities should not be considered as private in character but would become forces for “the transformation of human existence and its environment.”¹¹² In concrete terms they would guide, for example:

“the total reconstruction of our cities and of the countryside; the restoration of nature after the elimination of the violence and destruction of capitalist industrialisation; the creation of internal and external space for privacy, individual autonomy, tranquillity; the elimination of noise, of captive audiences, of enforced togetherness, of pollution, of ugliness.”¹¹³

After 1968, the New Left’s assessment of the student occupations aimed to account for the role of this expanded and transformed intelligentsia. One aspect of the analysis drew upon Mao’s concept of the red base, another used the Althusserian concept of the over-determined contradiction, other

¹¹¹ Louvre 1992 p45

¹¹² Marcuse 1968 p184

¹¹³ Marcuse 1968 p86

approaches considered the peculiarities of late capitalism in terms of theories derived from Lefebvre, Debord and Marcuse. These theoretical sources were diverse but a common factor was that they were employed to analyse the upsurge of student radicalism spatially. Whilst such an objective theorised the *sociological* inaccessibility of student militants to forms of incorporation and repression perpetrated by the hegemonic class, there was an underlying interest in geographical space and the way it was occupied.

Partly this interest was linked to the apparent connections between student militancy and a broader generational revolt, and the forms of this convergence: street fashion, the rock festivals, the cultural style of demonstrations and marches. Student occupations were also connected, in the views of some writers, to other forms of radicalised space, such as the anti-hospital, the common element being the emotional intensity of the experience of individual spontaneity as boundaries were challenged and authority was undermined. But as the experience of some women participants in the New Left might suggest, some barriers remained firmly intact until very late in the decade.

As this brief survey of the development of the New Left in Britain up to 1968 indicates, there was an evident effort to formulate a strategy connecting different instances of social antagonism. This was grounded in the assumption that under conditions of advanced capitalism everyday life was an important terrain of conflict and that students were for a number of reasons (to do with generational consciousness as well as their functional importance within bourgeois society) central to conflicts over the management of everyday life. Struggles against imperialism were invested with an immensely personal and emotional intensity the nature of which can be understood when considered in terms of space. The street demonstration or the occupation of a building (even the wearing of a particular style of clothing, or a hairstyle) was far more than an opportunity to express a political demand but an end in itself and also a reverberation of other struggles taking place elsewhere. The LSE may have considered its construction of the gates as uncontroversial but from another perspective it was an insidious development, comparable to the way the growth of new towns in France in the early sixties produced functional spaces

embedding authority into the very fabric of everyday life, thus making the ordinary and everyday the principal arena of struggle in late capitalism, as Henri Lefebvre had observed.¹¹⁴

If the personal was to be connected to the political it was extremely useful to be able to perceive such connections in terms of physical and institutional space. Such an approach, whilst discussed in theoretical terms by the New Left and practiced in the forms of the student occupations and anti-institutions, was also evidenced in architecture: imagined, planned and even built in some instances. Architectural and spatial forms which embodied the same kinds of ideas that were expressed in New Left theoretical debate might even have more relevance than the brief moment of student militancy, may even be the fundamental legacy of 1968. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter

¹¹⁴ See discussion of Lefebvre in Chapter Six

Chapter Six

Suburbia or the Barricades? The Politics of Indeterminacy

“There is, relatively speaking, something remarkably healthy about the chronic schizophrenic, preoccupied with his inner world, spending the day hunched over the central heating fitting in a decrepit back ward. If he does not have the solution to the riddle of life at least he has fewer illusions.”¹

“To pry the subject free from the stifling repetitions of everyday convention and to nurture an emergent individuality... a social experiment that would fuel both conflict and cooperation.”²

“Everything is architecture and we are all architects.”³

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the similarities between forms of space politics derived from the European avant-garde and schemes produced by British radical architects. Both, it is suggested, might be defined as a politics of indeterminacy. But is such a politics best illustrated by the Parisian model (the barricade), or might it be defined in terms of British pop/architecture theory in the wake of 1968 (suburbia)?

The space politics of the barricade, it will be argued, conceived of the space which would be seized, and subsequently transformed, as having an emotional and poetic quality which would allow the subject to be freed from alienation and new forms of oppression. This was a form of space politics associated with the avant-garde with its origins in Surrealism: the Situationist International, led by Guy Debord; and Henri Lefebvre, whose work on the production of space

¹ Cooper 1965 p13

² Lobsinger 2000, p119

³ A phrase associated with the Fluxus movement, cited by Franks 2000 p41

conceived of the oppressive structures of everyday life as embodied in modern architectural form.

The theory of indeterminacy had part of its origins in ideas about avant-garde art, but was particularly developed in British radical architecture theory (and some, limited, practice). Indeterminate architecture was in part associated with attempts to reclaim or produce spaces within which spontaneity and vitality might flourish (and in that respect it had some similarities with the Surrealism inspired avant-garde) but it was also concerned with challenging the lack of utility of architecture that could not adapt to changes over time, and favoured forms that could incorporate flexibility and expandable elements, therefore.

The Fun Palace project⁴ will be considered as an example of indeterminate architecture. The Fun Palace was to combine the vitality and spontaneity of liberated space with a high degree of flexibility in its structure. The Fun Palace is compared to the anti-hospital (an example of one of the anti-institutions discussed in the previous chapter) and it is suggested that their similarities were in a common attitude towards the user who was considered to be an alienated subject who might be liberated from the oppressive conventions of everyday life.

There was, however, in British pop architecture theory a growing element which emphasised the utilitarian aspect of flexible and expendable structures, in an approach which also drew on themes associated with Britain's modernisation project. The Thinkbelt⁵ is one such scheme discussed, which might be contrasted with the work of the French Utopie group.⁶ A significant emerging element in British theory is one which turned towards the suburb as a model of democratic participation to be contrasted with the inflexibilities of older urban forms. Reyner Banham discussed this in an article largely concerned with

⁴ Lewis 1965

⁵ Price 1966

⁶ Violeau 1999

American developments⁷ but this approach is at its most developed in the Non-Plan essay, published in 1969.⁸

Non-Plan proposed the abandonment of physical planning and envisaged spontaneous development and growth. Its participatory model was based on pop culture which the Non-Plan authors considered to be immediate and responsive to its users' desires. Pop culture represented a massive visual explosion but its impact on the British landscape had been negligible, as a consequence of planning restrictions. Non-Plan continued to express itself on occasions using the language of vitality, but it was a scheme for architectural indeterminacy which had very little connection with the politics of alienation. Cybernetics and systems theory were the models favoured by Non-Plan to suggest the possibility of popular, participatory and democratic space. Their differences notwithstanding, both European and British models were forms of cultural politics which assumed continued, rising affluence. Despite their differences they were both, overwhelmingly, a politics of consumption.

The Politics of the Barricades

The politics of the barricade was concerned, it has been argued, with the emotional and poetic dimensions to the command of space rather than the consummation of larger strategic objectives associated with particular slogans or programmatic demands. Thus, it was suggested in the previous chapter, the approach to space found in David Cooper's anti-hospital had similarities with that found in the occupation of the LSE: both were partly motivated by the idea that the power structures of contemporary capitalism repressed individual freedom and spontaneity on a deep psychological level, subduing the individual through a whole panoply of stifling conventions, and that such impositions were operative through the architecture governing space.

Such an approach was most explicit within European avant-garde political movements which had origins in Surrealism. Making a connection between liberated space and the poetic and emotional was a characteristic of the

⁷ Banham 1981g

Situationists, for example. During the May events in Paris in 1968 the streets and universities were occupied in acts of defiance of authority. Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationist International, saw the Paris uprising as having profound significance, regarding it as the beginning of an insurrection which would rapidly sweep across France and bring about the destruction of capitalist power. It would be incorrect to suggest that Debord or the Situationists led the uprising, nor could it be suggested that it was the consequence of their political interventions in earlier years, but the theories produced by members of the Situationist International seemed to offer some explanation of the events and the form they took. It is important to recognise, however, the intellectual and theoretical foundation upon which Debord had based his conclusions. From the early days of the post-war French avant-garde, out of which the Situationist International was eventually formed, there had been an emphasis on space as the medium of radical change.

Henri Lefebvre, once associated with the SI but one of the many who fell out with Debord, had also been concerned with the production of space. Modern architecture and the post-war planning regime were thought to be particularly malignant examples of a process whereby the enormous vitality of everyday life was regulated and controlled and it was considered vital that these virulent forms of spatiality be challenged. Following his break with the PCF in 1958, Lefebvre had further developed his emancipatory vision which drew upon notions of alienation now applied in the context of a rapidly transforming French society. Lefebvre had despaired at the construction of the new town of Moulon in south western France in the late fifties, considering it to be a model of new forms of alienation. In Moulon, Lefebvre argued, the working class would die not of starvation but of boredom, the city in its totality acting to suppress spontaneity, emotion and surprise in favour of a “puerile functionalism.”⁹ Thus, the task of revolutionaries was no longer simply to overthrow the prevailing means of production but to emancipate the individual

⁸ Banham *et al* 1969

⁹ Henri Lefebvre: ‘Les nouveaux ensembles urbains. Un cas concret: Moulon et les problèmes urbains de la nouvelle classe ouvrière’ in *Revue française de sociologie* no1 1960 p201 translated and cited in Jean-Louis Violeau 1999 p39

from him or herself, in terms of sexuality, consciousness and the deeply embedded structures of everyday life and behaviour.

Spatial practices engaged in during the early 1950s such as the *dérive* had involved participants attempting to penetrate the surface of the conventional and regulated city in order to discover its vital and expressive core. In many ways the Situationist's celebration of the spatial politics of the 1968 uprising drew from these early tactics. When students took control of the streets their achievement was not simply to express an ideological message in the form of slogans and demands but to transform relations of power, materially; relations which in the late 20th century were incorporated into an oppressive architecture.

Indeterminacy

The concept of indeterminacy was an attempt to resolve a relatively old problem in modern architecture which recognised that the building needed to adapt over time to changing functions and to the availability of new technologies. The problem was to find a way in which the professional architect might stand back from the design process and concede that the structure's form would develop in indeterminate ways over time, in fact that the architecture might be conceived of in such a way as to facilitate such a process. Indeterminacy theory tended to emphasise the lack of utility of architectural forms that were unable to adapt to more complex individual needs. In so far as indeterminacy theory also drew on ideas present in avant-garde art theory, it also, sometimes, alluded to the oppressive, repetitive nature of conventional spaces.

Modernist design theory in its orthodox form did not favour such a challenge to the authority of the architect but during the 1950s new models began to be discussed which might incorporate a more dynamic approach. One approach had its origins in 19th century debates which suggested that organic forms were underpinned by architectonic qualities and that the growth of natural organisms was analogous to the architectural process.¹⁰ This had some influence on the London - based Constructionist group of artists in the 1950s who used the

organic model as a means of incorporating a dynamic element into their artwork.¹¹

Another approach, more central to the concern of this thesis, attempted to undermine architecture's privileged place within design theory and to position it firmly within post-war consumer culture. We have already discussed in some depth the early 1950s attitude towards popular culture found amongst Independent Group participants such as Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway. In their responses to post-war consumer culture these writers had tried to develop an aesthetic which could accommodate the culturally transient and expendable. In fact transitory and fleeting forms were given a positive value because of their vitality and ability to express changing needs and desires, and because of their apparently democratic responsiveness. In many ways this approach was indicative of a naïve enthusiasm for the market as facilitator of choice. But not all consumer markets were approved of, only those consumer goods industries producing artefacts the desirability of which could be understood in terms of the fleeting and contingent.¹²

In Britain in the 1960s there were a few practical applications of the indeterminacy principle to architecture. John Weeks' design for Northwick Park Hospital (1961-1974) attempted to incorporate flexibility and change into the structure,¹³ and the design for Milton Keynes was based on establishing a grid within which any activities could occur, a motorised environment influenced by the example of Los Angeles and with the absence of a centralised focus which would have been a feature of a conventional city.¹⁴ In fact Los Angeles was a suburban model which illustrated many of the features favoured by British radical architects and theorists. In general, though, indeterminate architecture was not built but was an expression of developing ideas about the spatial environment in Britain in the sixties, the relationship of this environment to

¹⁰ See, for example, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form* 1917, discussed in Hughes 2000 p90

¹¹ Hughes 2000 p91

¹² To adopt a Baudelairean term

¹³ Hughes 2000 p90 pp93-95

¹⁴ Hughes 2000 p95

notions of flexibility and disorder, and involved the application of ideas about popular culture in order to understand this relationship.

From the Fun Palace to the Anti-Hospital

A good example of how this relationship was explored in architectural terms was the 1960s Fun Palace project, described by one critic as “essentially anti-art, concerned with process and indeterminacy and promising jolly fun for all,”¹⁵ rather than the construction of buildings. The project was initiated by long-established popular theatre activist Joan Littlewood and radical architect Cedric Price. In 1953 Joan Littlewood had found a home for her Theatre Workshop company in the derelict Theatre Royal in London's Stratford East. Littlewood had for years promoted popular theatre and, having adopted a Brechtian approach, she sought a more direct engagement with the audience. She believed that theatre was part of everyday life and that the popular arts should be able to connect with the vitality of the everyday.¹⁶

“When we moved into Theatre Royal, E15, we were pillaged and robbed... Youthful blackmailers would set upon any member of the audience parking a car in the vicinity... There was only one way. Educate the ‘young savages’ who, for the most part, could neither read nor write.”¹⁷

So the “young savages were allowed into the theatre, if they behaved themselves...[and by] 1975 our savages were designing and running their own festivals.”¹⁸

In 1963, Littlewood directed a film located in the East End which incorporated her romantic attitude towards urban working class culture. In *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963), Cockney sailor Charlie Gooding returns home to find his home demolished and his wife gone. Maggie Gooding (Barbara Windsor) is co-habiting with a bus driver and has given birth to a child of uncertain paternity. The film represents traditional working class life as rich and vital in comparison

¹⁵ Buchanan 1983 p17

¹⁶ See Goorney 1981

¹⁷ Littlewood 1994 p740

to commercialised culture, and whilst chaotic, disordered and overcrowded, it is viewed as superior also to the antiseptic and regulated modernism which seemed to be replacing it. East End slums are represented as warm, earthy and abundant with children and cultural diversity; the cast of Cockney characters, all regarded with equal tolerance, included friendly tarts, Jewish bakers, and a bird-breeding lodger.

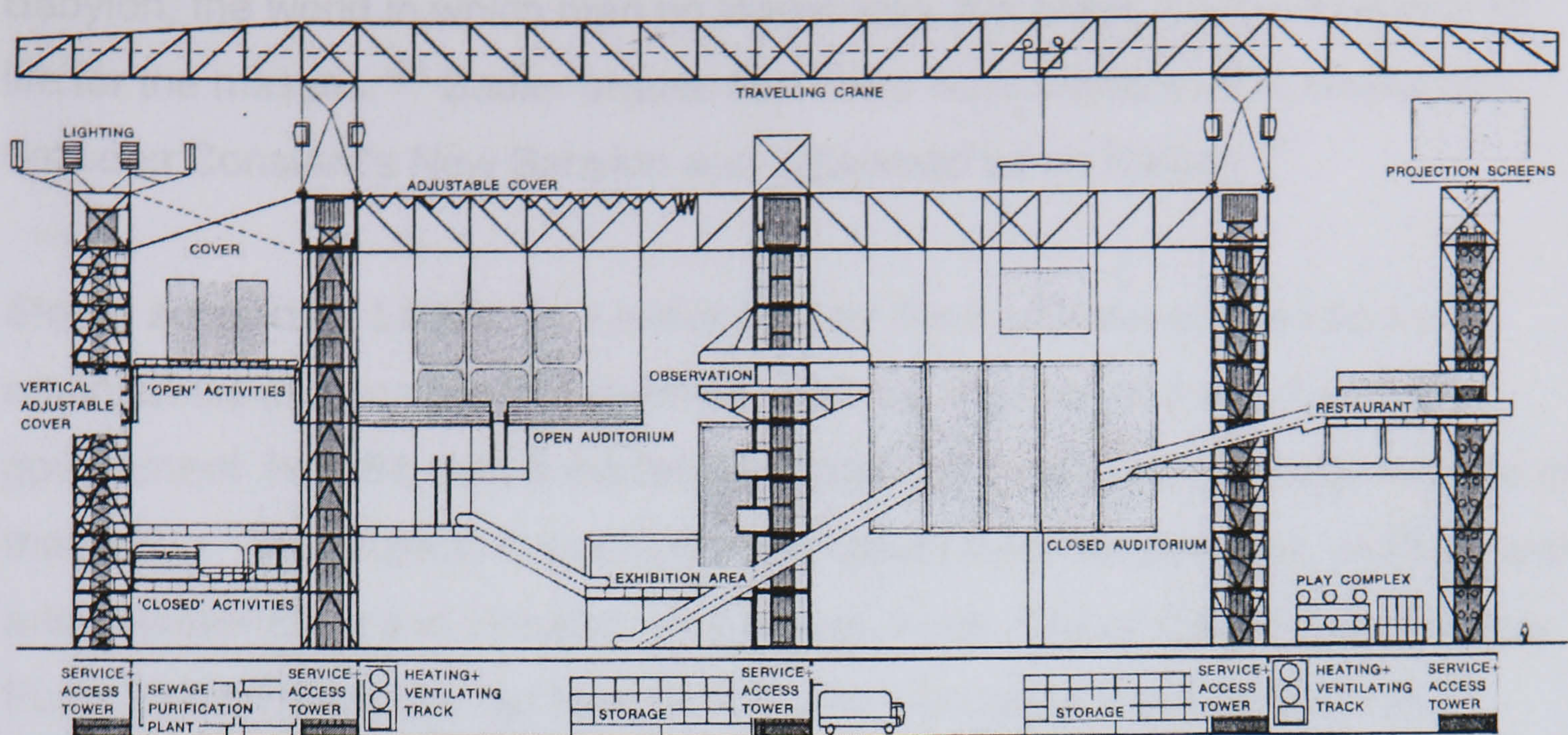
Littlewood's romantic view of working class culture represented in *Sparrows Can't Sing* was related to her Brecht-inspired attitude towards theatre. In sixties Britain the ideas that the arts should engage directly with the audience and that there should be a connection with the vitality of everyday life frequently took a modernist architectural form. Not the soulless modernism which was castigated in *Sparrows Can't Sing*, however, but a radical and avant-garde architecture.

In 1964 Joan Littlewood and radical architect Cedric Price (who would subsequently contribute to Non-Plan) had introduced the Fun Palace project to a broad audience through the journal *New Scientist*.¹⁹ Cedric Price came from the early sixties moment of radical architecture associated with the magazine *Archigram*, and like Archigram architecture, the Fun Palace would be composed of 'plug-in' or 'clip-on' elements, less of a free-standing building in its own right than a series of modules which could function as part of a system able to deliver various services to its users. Unlike Archigram architecture, which had a comic book vitality, the Fun Palace never took on much of a physical form, its principal quality being the overwhelming flexibility of its structural elements, allowing it to absorb any cultural function. Price was insistent that architecture should be "pure facility, a huge flexible framework."²⁰ it should be responsive to any passing desire on the part of its audience, constantly engaging with individuals who wandered into its architectural space.

¹⁸ Littlewood 1994 p740

¹⁹ Littlewood 1964

²⁰ Buchanan 1983 p19



The Fun Palace was a building which was intended to capture the drama and vitality of the everyday life represented in Littlewood's film of the same period. The scheme, which was never realised, has sometimes been compared to the Pompidou Centre, for which it was an inspiration.²¹ It was to be a modern arts centre which would facilitate the participation of a popular audience by responding and adapting to its desires. Crucially, the Fun Palace was not to be a place offering passive entertainment. In her analysis of the project, Lobsinger argued that the function of the building would be to prise the audience "free from the stifling repetitions of everyday convention... to nurture an emergent individuality."²²

The key to the Fun Palace was an avant-garde sense of poetry as a means of overcoming the boredom and monotony of contemporary life: "It was essential that the Fun Palace should create situations, circumstances, and conditions under which activities, hitherto unimagined would occur,"²³ and it did this in a style similar to that evoked by European exponents of avant-garde urbanism. Constant Nieuwenhuys (who signed his work 'Constant') was a painter, sculptor and architect, a founder of the avant-garde group known as Cobra, and a former member of the Situationist International. Constant had suggested his own urban utopia which he called New Babylon: "The world of plenty is New

²¹ Buchanan 1983; Sadler 1999

²² Lobsinger 2000 p119

Babylon, the world in which man no longer toils, but plays; poetry as a way of life for the masses.”²⁴ Sadler argues that there were considerable similarities between Constant’s New Babylon and Littlewood’s Fun Palace.²⁵

Strong support for Littlewood’s initial idea for the Fun Palace could be found amongst the progressive intelligentsia, and the election of a new Labour government in 1964, with a modernising agenda, highlighted the significance of that group. The projects supporters were drawn from the scientific, political and arts establishment and included: Asa Briggs, Lord Ritchie Calder, Buckminster Fuller, Yehudi Menuhin, Ian Mikardo MP and, inevitably, Tom Driberg MP.²⁶

Littlewood was able to reach to the highest authority – Jennie Lee was Arts Minister in the government and widow of Nye Bevan who had been a friend of Littlewood, and she was interested.

Cybernetics was a key avant-garde concept in sixties Britain, premised on the notion that the feedback of information was essential to the production of machines capable of responding to their environment, and it was central to the Fun Palace project. Cybernetics was first conceived of by Norbert Wiener in 1947 “as the comparative scientific study of ‘control and communication in the animal and the machine.’”²⁷ Multi-disciplinary but taking its inspiration from the possibilities apparently offered by computer science, cybernetics was a hugely ambitious project. But its early history suggested that the technology was never quite adequate to the tasks it set itself. Pask wrote in 1968: “Nowadays, when psychedelic effects are commonly synchronised with music, the whole idea of augmenting sound by light is almost as banal as another happening. However, it was not so in the early 1950s.”²⁸

²³ Author Unknown 1967 (article in *Architectural Design*)

²⁴ Nieuwenhuys 1967 p53

²⁵ Sadler 1999 pp132-134

²⁶ The connections between the Fun Palace and the Establishment were numerous if not direct. Cedric Price had worked with Lord Snowdon, for example, on designing the London Zoo aviary.

²⁷ Sadler 1999 p148

²⁸ Pask 1971 p77

Pask formed the Fun Palace cybernetics committee in 1963 and discussed the significance of the discipline for architecture, in an article in 1969.²⁹ Pask suggested that cybernetics and architecture should enjoy an intimate relationship because, as the last 100 years had demonstrated, architects were essentially “systems designers.” As early as the Victorian era architects had been asked to

“... make a ‘railway station’ or make a ‘great exhibition’. The solution to such (in those days) outlandish problems clearly depends upon seeing the required building as a part of the ecosystem of a human society.”³⁰

The implications of system design were that a building “perpetually interacts with its inhabitants, on the one hand serving them and on the other controlling their behaviour.”³¹ An architect/system designer had the opportunity to design structures that could “foster a productive and pleasurable dialogue.”³²

Dialogical³³ buildings were the objective, therefore. This was not, as one might imagine, an outcome that was dependant on an available technology but could be already observed in some existing environments. The *Parque Guell* in Barcelona was one such environment:

“the most cybernetic structure in existence.... Gaudi achieved a dialogue between his environment and its inhabitants. He did this using physically static structures (the dynamic processes depending upon the movement of people or shifts in their attention).”³⁴

But computer technology did suggest that physically dynamic structures were now possible, and this was one of the principles behind the Fun Palace. Pask’s vision was initially the stuff of science fiction. A computer could control all of the visual and tactile properties of a building and, in the absence of human

²⁹ Pask 1969

³⁰ Pask 1969 p494

³¹ Pask 1969 p494

³² Pask 1969 p494

³³ A term I have appropriated from Bakhtin

inhabitants, it would remain reasonably static. But once humans entered the loop it would start a 'conversation' with them and learn about and adapt to their behaviour patterns. The building might also use its capacity to adapt as a means of controlling its inhabitants.

Most of the technologies upon which the project was based were impracticable at the time ('static vapour zones', 'artificial clouds'), and cybernetics was very rudimentary in its technological development. The history of cybernetics in Britain began in 1953 when Gordon Pask, then working at Cambridge, built his first 'musicolour' machine, a device which received a musical input through a microphone which was then translated into coloured forms projected onto a large screen viewable by both musicians and audience. The device did not simply convert one medium into another but was able to listen to the music and form a reaction to it. If confronted by musicians whose output was monotonous then the device would get 'bored,' if the sounds were varied and expressed novelty it would react in an excited manner. Because performers were eventually able to understand what the machine liked and disliked they were able to train it through the nuances of their performance. On the other hand it could be suggested that the machine was training the performers.

Cybernetic philosophy did not conceive of any distinction between machines and organisms, when they were linked together within this type of system, its focus being on the 'loop', into which machine, performers and audience were all coupled, rather than specific modules. Pask considered that the profound insight of cybernetics was that intelligence was entirely a matter of communication, or 'conversation', or 'feedback' and that the application of the term, 'artificial intelligence' to machines was a misnomer.³⁵

Pask toured his machine around the North of England, and then to London, between 1955 and 1957, and in his account of these events, some have the flavour of early 'happenings'. An early gig had been at the Pomegranete Club, "an eclectic Dadaist organisation" founded by Valentine Boss. But the north

³⁴ Pask 1969 pp495-6

country tour visited such definitively non – avant-garde locations as Liverpool, New Brighton and Llandudno. Whilst on tour with his machine, Pask noted that sometimes an audience could be coupled into the loop: “We also used the system when people were dancing and discovered that in these conditions an audience can participate in the performer-machine feedback loop just because they are doing something to music and the band is responding to them.”³⁶

The musicolour machine was a relatively simple device. Its purpose was as a research tool into the construction of “reactive and adaptive aesthetic environments,”³⁷ an important attribute of which was that it should “respond to a man, engage him in conversation and adapt its characteristics to the prevailing mode of discourse.”³⁸ In the case of the musicolour machine, considerable progress had been made in coupling the performers into a loop, less so with the audience.

In the case of the Fun Palace, its dialogue with its inhabitants would not lead to systemic adaptation over very short periods (minutes or hours) but over much longer periods: 8 hour and weekly cycles of transformation were built into the Fun Palace specification.³⁹

It should be clear that the Fun Palace was a form of architecture the structure of which challenged traditional authority in a number of ways. Pask’s view was that when the architect became a system designer he could no longer behave like the traditional authority figure whose access to the canonical rules of ‘pure’ architecture was unquestioned. The design goal is “nearly always underspecified,”⁴⁰ meaning that it necessarily incorporated considerable scope for adaptations as a consequence of feedback from other components within the conversational loop; that is from the inhabitants. The designer had become,

³⁵ Pask 1969 pp495-6

³⁶ Pask 1971 p88

³⁷ Pask 1971 p77

³⁸ Pask 1971 p77

³⁹ Pask 1969 p496

⁴⁰ Pask 1969 p496

in a phrase reminiscent of the new anti-psychiatry “an odd mixture of catalyst, crutch, memory and arbiter.”⁴¹

The significance of this particular way of challenging authority can be better understood by placing it in a broader historical context. The malleable and constantly changing structure of the Fun Palace can be related to other forms of anti-architecture, such as the enthusiasm for inflatable solutions to architectural problems, but also to wider concerns about rigid and relatively permanent boundaries and their undesirability. The notion of an anti-architecture reminds us of other monoliths that were being challenged. The Fun Palace in many respects looks like an anti-hospital, another sixties challenge to established space. In the course of consecutive months in 1965, *New Society* published discussions of the Fun Palace,⁴² and of an experimental psychiatry unit dubbed “The anti-hospital.”⁴³ Despite some obvious differences, these discussions drew upon very similar assumptions.

David Cooper’s account of the anti-hospital experiment is concerned with the passivity and submissiveness of the mental patient, the parallels between dull, repetitive and meaningless work inside and outside the hospital, the need to break down authority relationships between staff and patient, and the intense anxieties that such challenges produced.

Cooper argued that the traditional hospital placed an emphasis on the “passivity” of the patient who had to “submit” to treatment and “wait” to be cured.⁴⁴ Littlewood’s intense interest in her audience, especially the “young savages” of the locality, was based on the premise that activating that audience would be a liberating event. Local youths who might vandalise the theatre to begin with might later become participants.

Cooper’s anti-hospital had the characteristics of a red base: a liberated zone in the heart of a conventional hospital and a space where conventional ideas of

⁴¹ Pask 1969 p496

⁴² Lewis 1965

⁴³ Cooper 1965

time discipline were broken down. In Cooper's view, Schizophrenics were not sick individuals but more like scapegoats who had been nominated by malfunctioning families to become the patient. Having to bear the weight of so much coercion in the normal hospital situation naturally made them rebellious and thereby their insanity was confirmed. Conflicts over getting-up in the morning illustrated the way in which staff colluded in the fantasy that they were dealing with sick individuals who, left to their own devices, would cease to function. But, Cooper maintained, this was a case of "the patient [as] that frightening aspect of themselves that does not want to get out of bed in the morning and come to work."⁴⁵ Anxieties concerning "time regulation" lay at the heart of this obsession.

Traditionally, the expectations of the hospital authorities were that patients should be occupied in productive activities. But one cannot read Cooper's description of these activities without seeing also their parallels beyond the institution. The compliant patient who submissively carried out the menial domestic tasks set for them by their carers was, in Cooper's view, a prime example of the chronically institutionalised, whereas:

"There is, relatively speaking, something remarkably healthy about the chronic schizophrenic, preoccupied with his inner world, spending the day hunched over the central heating fitting in a decrepit back ward. If he does not have the solution to the riddle of life at least he has fewer illusions."⁴⁶

The Fun Palace project was to be a "counter-blast to boredom,"⁴⁷ not the provision of leisure activities that would simply parallel the dull repetitiveness of the work environment but a challenge to work *and* leisure as the twin pillars of a dull and conformist post-war society.

There is a further parallel between these two sixties projects: the attitude towards roles, role-playing and the questioning of authority. Cooper's account

⁴⁴ Cooper 1965 p11

⁴⁵ Cooper 1965 p12

⁴⁶ Cooper 1965 p13

of the anti-hospital is partially driven by a narrative. In its early stages staff found it difficult to abandon their traditional roles which were largely based on hierarchy, with the psychiatrist figure occupying a position of near mystical authority, and with a rigid division between the staff who were sane and the patients who were not, this latter group requiring treatment. But what if patients started to treat other patients; or even the staff? As the experiment passed into its second year disturbing events took place as participants began to challenge those forms of authority based not on any real expertise but on “arbitrary social definition.” The moment of crisis came in the course of a particularly disturbing group meeting when one of the clinically most psychotic patients on the ward: “lulled [us] into a fascinated somnolence by his account of a ‘bizarre’, imaginary world tour. We became a sort of collective infant at the breast of the mother narrator.”⁴⁸

The Fun Palace project was well aware of the power of role-play and incorporated a questioning of roles into its proposals in two ways. Firstly, the visitor would be offered the opportunity of choosing a role for the duration of his or her visit, as an attempt to reproduce the type of ritualistic ceremony found in primitive societies. This would be “cathartic”; a term drawn from psychological theory, but the playing out of roles would also be facilitated in the context of a safe environment. And role playing would encourage visitors to understand the social situation of others: “Like J.H. Griffin, the white man who went into the Deep South disguised as black, we see unfamiliar relationships in their true light.” Nevertheless, the setting up of an “identity bar where visitors can buy paper hats and clothes to suit the personality... that they want to assume”⁴⁹ was a relatively trivial example of an attitude towards the audience, which was comparable to the anti-hospital. If patients in the anti-hospital might find themselves in the role of “mother narrator,” visitors to the Fun Palace might also be required, not to listen and be entertained, but to participate in the construction of theatrical events.

⁴⁷ Lewis 1965 p8

⁴⁸ Cooper 1965 p15

⁴⁹ Lewis 1965 p9

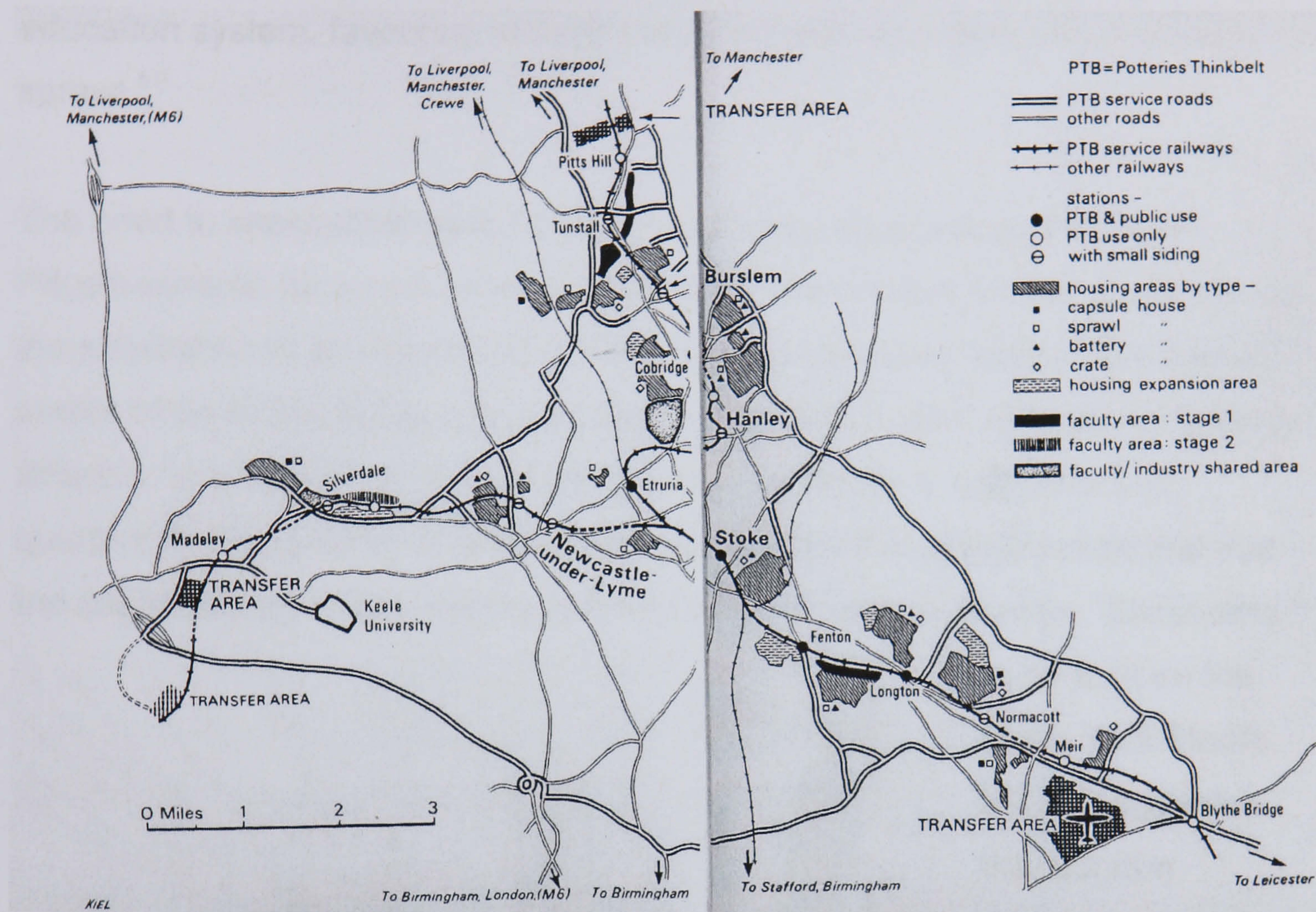
One might draw a parallel between the Fun Palace and the anti-hospital, and suggest that both had the characteristics of the anti-institution, or to conceive of this in the more politicised language of the late sixties, that both were red bases.⁵⁰ These were spaces which were radically dissonant in comparison to conventional space, they were intended to have a deep and abiding impact on those who entered them, breaking down an adherence to dull conformity within the individual and encouraging participation. In fact the theory of cybernetics was one which conceived of buildings as systems capable of facilitating forms of engagement previously not permitted because of the overwhelming authority of the architect or planner. But one has only to shift the ground slightly to see this type of participation as most prevalent in pop culture and as facilitated most effectively in the choices offered by the market. And, in this respect, the result may not be an avant-garde assault on the dull conformity of post war mass culture, as Littlewood or Cooper saw it, but its realisation in the suburb.

The Potteries Thinkbelt and the Pop-Up Parliament

What was beginning to characterise these British projects in the architecture of indeterminacy was a direct engagement with the politics of modernisation. These were not simply exercises in the imaginary construction of a flexible architecture but they made statements about prevailing approaches to land use, which commented upon and questioned the archaism of British culture. One of the principles of the architecture of the anti-institution identified above was an emphasis not on the permanence of buildings but on the flexibility and expendability of space. Whereas the orthodox approach to architecture was that its structure must be of sufficient durability to withstand decades of weathering, sixties radical thinking challenged the notion of permanence on two grounds. The greater the lifespan of a building, the less adaptable was it to the needs and desires of its users. The principle of expendability rather than permanence, when applied to architecture, allowed one to conceive of a structure as existing in a relationship of interdependence with its users. But another challenge to architectural orthodoxy understood permanence as indicative of entrenched forms of class privilege and authority, notions with a

⁵⁰ A term Cooper readily adopts in Cooper 1971 p66

particular resonance in sixties Britain. Both of these challenges to orthodoxy were incorporated into Cedric Price's plan for a new form of higher education, known as Thinkbelt, published in 1965.

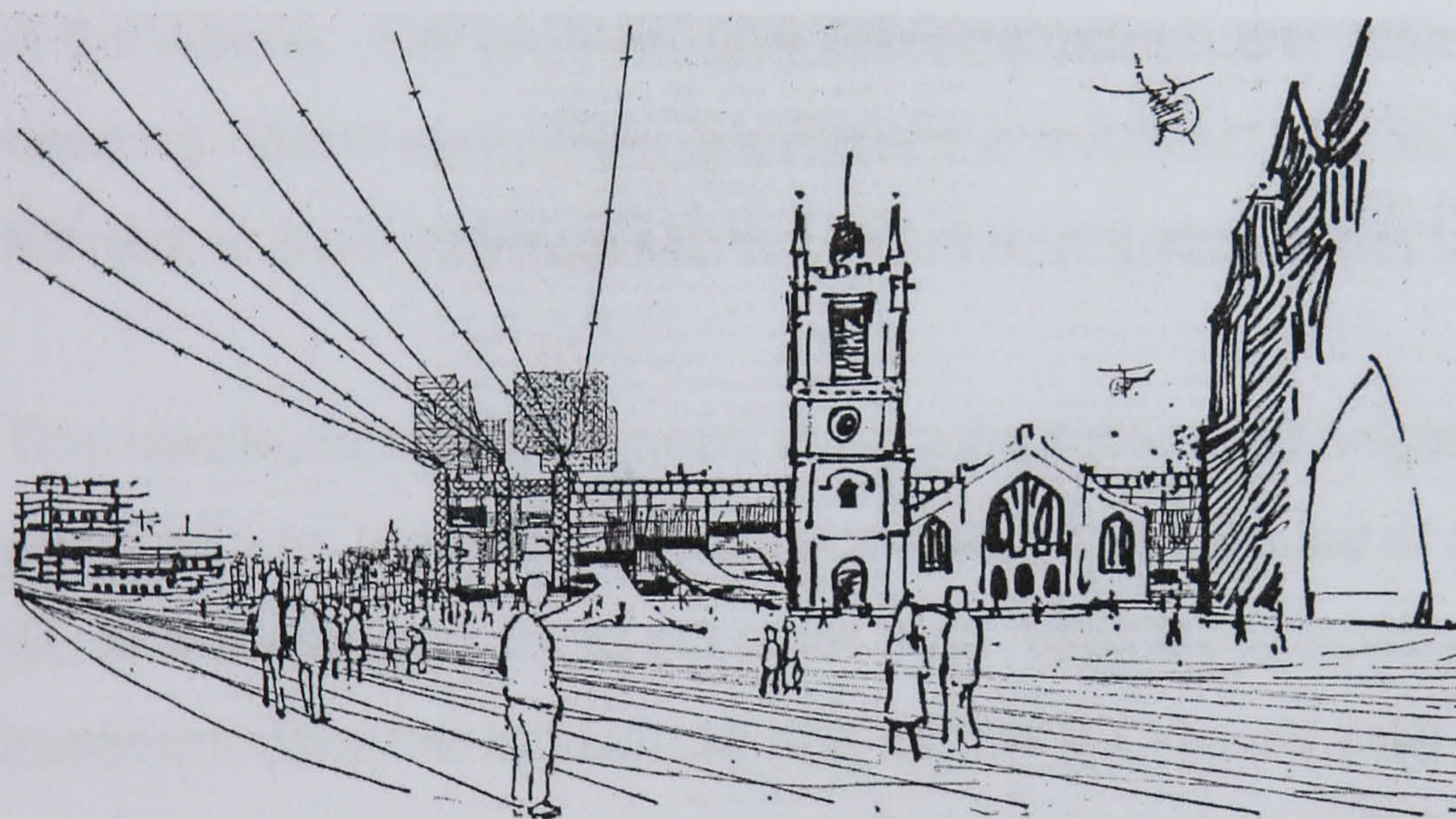


Cedric Price's proposal was to take the decaying industrial infrastructure of the Potteries, and produce from it a new kind of university, called the Potteries Thinkbelt. This was not to be a 'building', but rather a network, with mobile classrooms and laboratories using the existing rail lines to move from place to place: from housing to library to factory or place of work. It formed a triangle from Pitts Hill to Madeley to Meir, encompassing all the towns inside, including Stoke. Existing factories would be used for study, whilst new factories would be built to develop technologies pioneered in the Thinkbelt.

Price's idea was to break down the wall between 'pure' and 'applied' science and technology, lure scientists back to Britain, and put England at the forefront of advanced technologies. There was an obvious context for this in the Wilson government's modernisation strategy, one which placed considerable emphasis on the development of science and technology as essential to economic growth but which had also associated the absence of this under the

previous administration with the latter's social archaism. Oxbridge and the public school system were frequently cited as responsible, in part, for the backwardness of Britain. Price was blunt in his suggestion that the polite university town with its medieval buildings was no place to locate a modern education system, favouring instead the dynamism and democracy of suburban sprawl.⁵¹

The need to knock-down archaic structures was one developed in Cedric Price's scheme for a new British Parliament. The context for this proposal was the publication of the Martin-Buchanan plan for Whitehall which Paul Barker, author of an article in *New Society* discussing Price's plan, considered to be in Britain's "pragmatic' tradition of doing things by halves if not thirds and quarters."⁵² Barker's article also acknowledged the *Economist's* proposal that the capital should be moved away from London to a new location, 'Elizabetha,'



to be built on the North York Moors, but he suggested that London remained the "best place for receiving delegations, protests, the press and the individual citizen."⁵³ Price had produced a plan for

a new parliament which would not be an historic monument but a flexible, accessible and disposable structure, composed of suspended units, moved into place by cranes and removed when they were no longer required.

This would be a rational and efficient application of indeterminacy principles to space, but Barker considered other reasons why it was essential that the old

⁵¹ See Jencks 1969 for a discussion of Price's Thinkbelt as suburban sprawl

⁵² Barker 1965 p7

⁵³ Barker 1965 p7

building be demolished. The problem with the old Parliament, according to Barker, was that it was associated with order and permanence: “and permanence isn’t the thing to symbolise in an era of throwaway Pentel pens and planned obsolescence.”⁵⁴ Barker also objected to the club-like amateurism and inefficient use of space, symbolised by Tam Dalyell MP’s discovery within the Palace of Westminster of a “‘parade room’, with a superb southern outlook up the Thames, where I unearthed a man pressing his trousers in 690 sq. ft of space.”⁵⁵

Debates from within the legislative chambers would be transmitted to “a vast electronic forum” situated in Parliament Square. The square:

“besides being an outside extension of parliament among the public [would also be] an amphitheatre for the state opening, or for coronations and weddings in the Abbey. For protests and demonstrations and rallies too... The notion of keeping rioters away from parliament is outdated. People are too used to glass houses to want to throw stones. Parliament should not be insulated.”⁵⁶

The new building would need to be adaptable to changing functions, and if the decision was made in the future to abolish the House of Lords then it was the job of the architecture to allow for that. Whilst the building was there to accommodate the legislature and its MPs it should also be accessible to the public, and would have its own helicopter and hovercraft station which would be connected to the main building by travelators. Access for the public would be swift and democratic: “none of the sad feudal queues to get into Barry’s Palace.”⁵⁷ According to Barker, “lobbying and opinion-forming [would] become buoyantly mobile.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Barker 1965 p8

⁵⁵ Barker 1965 p7

⁵⁶ Barker 1965 p8

⁵⁷ Barker 1965 p8

⁵⁸ Barker 1965 p9

Utopie, Buoyancy and Revolution

Radical architectural schemes in Britain had incorporated significant elements which were comparable to the efforts of European avant-garde groups. The French group Utopie had offered a radical critique of architecture, urbanism and everyday life and had done so by employing a form of architectural indeterminacy with close parallels to such British examples as the Fun Palace, the Thinkbelt and the Pop-Up-Parliament. Indeterminate architecture was “informal, flexible, unenclosed and impermanent,”⁵⁹ with no arbitrary formal allegiances. Utopie, nevertheless, employed a particular, albeit highly flexible, form: pneumatics. Closely allied with Henri Lefebvre, the Utopie group of theorists and architects (which also included Jean Baudrillard) presented a vision of the built environment in which “buoyancy, ephemerality, and mobility would replace the inertia and repression that they believed characterised the architectural urbanism of the post-war.”⁶⁰ The practical contribution to the spring events in Paris of the Utopie group was the organisation of an exhibition – *Structures Gonflables* - at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which opened on March 1st 1968.

It is not always easy to understand precisely why the embrace of pneumatics as an architectural form was necessarily a means of challenging the alienation which Utopie saw as embedded into the fabric of everyday life. Peter Cook of Archigram had commented on:

“the ambiguity of the Utopie group in France, posed between a theoretical position in politics and a practical position in pneumatic structures which seemed to have little connection but perhaps generated a very strong will in between.”⁶¹

Suburbia and Indeterminacy

The theories and projects of radical British architecture had more coherence and clarity of purpose. In Reyner Banham’s article ‘A Home is not a House,’

⁵⁹ Landau 1968 p76

⁶⁰ Genevro 1999 p7

⁶¹ Peter Cook, cited in Genevro 1999 p8

first published in *Art in America* in 1965,⁶² Banham employed a notion of indeterminacy which used the example of American suburbia as its model. Banham suggested that from its beginning, architecture had two divergent aspects which related to different methods of controlling the environment: one practice was to avoid the environment, by hiding under a rock or building a house (architecture as we usually understand it); another was to interfere with the local meteorology, by building a campfire or by creating air conditioning. The first tended to produce permanent and, frequently, monumental structures, whilst the latter emphasised services. Banham's belief that the latter was, now, of fundamentally greater significance than the former led him to suggest that:

"When your house contains such a complex of piping, flues, ducts, wires, lights, inlets, outlets, ovens, sinks, refuse disposers, hi-fi reverberators, antennae, conduits, freezers, heaters - when it contains so many services that the hardware could stand up by itself without any assistance from the house, why have a house to hold it up?"⁶³

An emphasis on services rather than structure suggested far greater flexibility and the satisfaction of a greater range of human desires – a more effective "standard of living package"⁶⁴ – than conventional architecture was accustomed to dealing with, whereas vehicle design was highly attuned to such matters, leading Banham to suggest that the "car is already one of the strongest arms in America's environmental weaponry."⁶⁵ The irony of such a statement was far from self-evident in 1965 and Banham's basic proposition was that cheap and plentiful supplies of energy were a given, the only problem being how to make them more mobile. That the general level of affluence would continue to increase was not questioned. The car was significant because it was already delivering many of the services associated with conventional architecture, in the context, for example, of the drive-in cinema, but it was also a mobile power source which could sustain living in a variety of environments.

⁶² Banham 1981g

⁶³ Banham 1981g p56

⁶⁴ Banham appropriated the phrase from Buckminster Fuller

Banham discussed the forms that would enable a service as opposed to a structure based architecture, an approach which is comparable to that which was evident in Cedric Price's projects, as well as in the Utopie group's pneumatic architecture. But the context for Banham's and Cedric Price's interest in flexible and indeterminate architecture was a different one to that of European avant-garde theorists and practitioners motivated by the politics of alienation. The reason why the American experience was so significant for Banham was because it was here that the suburb was triumphant whereas the city was "an insecure foreign growth on the continent."⁶⁶ Suburbia, rather than epitomising dull conformity and a pacified working class as European radical attitudes suggested, was, for Banham, the expression of Jeffersonian democracy which extended beyond "agrarian sentimentality", offering instead "power-point homesteading in a paradise garden of appliances."⁶⁷

Towards the end of the 1960s, Reyner Banham, Peter Hall, Paul Rodgers and Cedric Price published an article called: 'Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom,' in the journal *New Society*. Non-Plan proposed a radical overhaul of Britain's spatial arrangements, arguing for an abandonment of the prescriptive and proscriptive planning regime that had been in place since 1947, replacing aesthetic control of the environment with approaches to architecture and built space which were drawn from pop culture and cybernetics. The emphasis was on choice, expendability and mobility, rather than compulsion, permanence and proximity.

Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom

In Reyner Banham's 'A Home is not a House' he had defended suburbia against its critics. Here was an example of the practical application of indeterminacy, but without an association with the politics of alienation as was generally associated with the New Left. Banham did not look towards American suburban space in order to find a poetic setting-free of the human subject, but he did see it as a model of participatory democracy. Non-Plan

⁶⁵ Banham 1981g p59

⁶⁶ Banham 1981g p60

⁶⁷ Banham 1981g p60

illustrates the application of this idea in a British context. If we recall Lefebvre's criticism of the construction of Moux in south western France in the late fifties, this was largely because he considered it to embody new forms of alienation. One of the objects of criticism in Non-Plan was the New Town of Harlow, but for different reasons to those employed by Lefebvre in the French context.

A large part of physical planning was concerned with regulation and preservation of the countryside, and much of this was justified in the cause of preserving the national heritage. Non-Planners suspected that this type of planning was less about "genuine concern for environmental and cultural values [than] merely class panic."⁶⁸ The countryside and its villages offered "the perfect ecology for retired officers and gentlemen who are now something in the city,"⁶⁹ but in the case of East Anglia, for example, a large part of London's surplus population had been "shut away in separated ghettos" such as Harlow New Town."⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the types of cultural and leisure amenities to which the residents of Harlow should be entitled were prevented from developing because of unyielding planning regulations. Non-Planners argued that rigid controls determining where people lived or went for their recreation were exercises in judgement by architects and planners

"about how they think *other* people - not of their acquaintance or class – should live. A remarkable number of the architects and planners who advocate togetherness, themselves live among space and green fields."⁷¹

In contrast they suggested what might happen to East Anglia if it were allowed to develop in response to the choices and desires of the majority of its residents, as opposed to those of the prosperous minority aided and abetted by conservative planning committees. If planning restrictions were lifted, the key change would be that the various villages within Harlow's vicinity (on the A11) would be connected up into a continuous ribbon and it would become "a kind of

⁶⁸ Banham *et al* 1969 p438

⁶⁹ Banham *et al* 1969 p438

⁷⁰ Banham *et al* 1969 p438

diffuse, linear downtown.”⁷² What Non-Plan’s authors called “Constable Country” would be transformed through a vigorous commercial development which would, nevertheless, have a picturesque quality. There would be an: “efflorescence of large and conspicuous advertising signs. The overall result could thus be low commercial buildings set well back from the road behind adequate parking courts, backed by tall trees and fronted by tall signs, with a soft, roly-poly countryside appearing behind.”⁷³

Such a description was clearly provocative. The planning establishment would probably consider it a “landscape of hysteria,”⁷⁴ it was suggested, but Non-Plan’s authors considered such a landscape to be “quite graceful to the eye; certainly more so than the quasi-regimented squalor of our present suburban industrial concentration camps.”⁷⁵

If Non-Plan was not speaking the politics of alienation that might have been found in earlier schemes, such as the Fun Palace project, it was, nevertheless, concerned to develop space that would not be squalid, monotonous and regimented. In fact “spontaneity and vitality” were sought after qualities, except these were not to be found in old European cities but in the desert and Pacific states of America, in places such as Las Vegas and Sunset Strip in Beverley Hills.⁷⁶

This was an effort to develop a model which could confront prevailing forms of spatial organisation in Britain and if one influence on this model was the example of a vital and spontaneous architecture that could be found in America’s Pacific western states, another was the theory of indeterminacy. It was noted above that the idea of architectural indeterminacy had its roots in the 19th century, when it was first realised that the predetermined structure of a building (the outcome of a masterplan) was not adaptable to changing circumstances and requirements. One element within Non-Plan similarly

⁷¹ Banham *et al* 1969 p442

⁷² Banham *et al* 1969 p439

⁷³ Banham *et al* 1969 p440

⁷⁴ Banham *et al* 1969 p440

⁷⁵ Banham *et al* 1969 p435

suggested that the formulation of a grand plan of this type was never adequate to the task of satisfying complex and changing human needs and that what was produced was frequently of benefit accidentally, in different ways to those intended. Partly this was to suggest the role of the consumer in adapting architecture to its desires and needs, despite the inflexibility built into such projects. Thus, Garden City theory had produced places such as Hampstead Garden Suburb which were inflexibly organised around food growing, and with a generous width of space allocation between houses (for reasons of health). The road layout which was a consequence of the latter made public transport almost impossible; and “the tin and frozen pack rapidly outdated the vegetable patch.”⁷⁷ Then, argued the Non-Planners, the spread of car ownership found justification for the space, which could now be used to absorb a garage, and the garden became a leisure space.⁷⁸

In fact changes during the post-war period were crucial to the type of indeterminacy that was now being recommended by Non-Plan, the objective being not simply that architecture incorporate a temporal dimension, but that it recognise the proliferation of desires associated with rising affluence. Non-Plan’s attitude towards increases in the general prosperity of the population had continuities with the aims and approach of the modernisation project envisaged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The most significant comparison is with Crosland’s vision of a non-Puritanical society within which the problems of economic growth had been resolved, but which now required a thoroughgoing modernisation of the entire apparatus of moral and ethical regulation. A greater respect for individual choice, less interference by the state in what should now be regarded as private questions of morality, would be incorporated into a society (and a physical environment and public architecture) organised more around leisure.

More than ten years after Crosland’s vision, Non-Plan envisaged the possibility of the “spread of pleasure” if only people were allowed to make their own

⁷⁶ Banham *et al* 1969 p443

⁷⁷ Banham *et al* 1969 p435

⁷⁸ Banham *et al* 1969 p435

choices and as the “division between freely willed and directed (i.e., between leisure and work) would erode.”⁷⁹ Like Crosland’s it was a vision based on the assumption that the normal condition of advanced western societies was one of increasing prosperity, and the consequences would be obvious because: “as people become richer they demand more space; and because they become at the same time more mobile, they will be able to command it.”⁸⁰ Such a situation would mean a far more decentralised society and the end of the inconveniently situated city shopping centre. Citizens would now be able to acquire their basic necessities from widely dispersed petrol stations in what was a highly mobile and motorised society. The consequence for the Solent region, one of Non-Plan’s proposed experimental zones, would be the development of its leisure industries as it became a stopping point for “auto-nomads” en route for the Continent from parts of Britain with a less favourable climate. It was a high-tech vision with obvious similarities to some of the technology incorporated into the Fun Palace project:

“An enclave would be irrupted into and become one of the main play-and-live edges of the London region... Floating grandstands [on the Solent], with public address systems and information displays, would involve visitors in the speed and performance trials of new water gear (hovercraft, speedboats, water-skis, life-saving). Large retractable marinas would have sail-in movies and row-in bars. Beach buggies would drive through the heathland... Britain’s first giant dome would rise on the Isle of Wight coast: the first all-weather, all-public Ile du Levant nudist scene in the country – thermostatically controlled and ten bob a head.”⁸¹

One should also note the similarities with Crosland’s non-Puritanical approach to pleasure: public nudism would be tolerated in this Non-Plan zone, the restrictive licensing laws would be abandoned and cannabis would be legally available, as “pot shops” would replace “all those declining tobaccoists.”⁸² Really, this was all a matter of seeing what happened if people were free to

⁷⁹ Banham *et al* 1969 pp440-441

⁸⁰ Banham *et al* 1969 p442

⁸¹ Banham *et al* 1969 p441

choose their lifestyle: “What would happen if there were no plan? What would people prefer to do, if their choice were untrammelled?”⁸³

There are similarities with what would become a key publication presenting the counterculture to a wider audience: Richard Neville’s *Playpower*, published a year later, in 1970. Neville had also associated an orientation towards pleasure rather than work with a high degree of mobility and had assumed that both were the consequence of material prosperity. Neville recalled an epithanal event:

“A Summer’s night; strolling at a pace which overtakes two girls in front. Both have sleeping bags slung over their backs, fringe leather jackets, mock Aztec jewellery and Eastern carpet shoulder bags. ‘Hello,’ smiles one of them, ‘isn’t it a good idea to say hello to strangers? No one ever does. We just said good evening to a old man and he freaked out completely.’ We walk together awhile. One is sixteen, the other a year older. They have both hitched down from Yarmouth, bound for Cornwall... We exchange good nights, one of them asking rhetorically ‘Do you smoke?’ as she slips into my hand a pebble of hash. A casual meeting. Two young chicks. Nothing extraordinary; except that girls like this are everywhere and they’re not going to grow up and marry bank managers.”⁸⁴

Neville’s view of the future was also one in which work was no longer the principal directive of life, and in which people might choose a more nomadic existence. Neither Non-Plan’s authors, nor Richard Neville, had envisaged that the rising material prosperity of the post-war period would end and, consequently, their cultural programmes appear naïve and unrealistic. Despite differences in tone and style both Neville and Non-Plan assume that *homo ludus*⁸⁵ was now a reality and both connected rising affluence to a more spontaneous culture which should not be restrained by coercive and oppressive regulation.

⁸² Banham *et al* 1969 p441

⁸³ Banham *et al* 1969 p436

⁸⁴ Neville 1970 p12

Non-Plan's claim that "the revolution in rising affluence (despite the current economic problems) means that a growing proportion of personal incomes will be funnelled off into ever more diverse and unpredictable outlets,"⁸⁶ underpinned its idea that predetermined physical planning was obsolete and authoritarian in character. In fact, the authors argued, "most planning is aristocratic and oligarchic in method... the most rigorously planned cities – like Haussman's and Napoleon 3rd's Paris have nearly always been the least democratic."⁸⁷ The authors argued that now, because of rising affluence and the diversity of consumer choice but also because of the new techniques of cybernetics and systems management, it was possible to replace crude, inadequate and undemocratic planning regimes with something based on popular participation. It was noted above that cybernetics was a key avant-garde concept in sixties Britain and that it incorporated the idea that the feedback of information was essential to the production of responsive machines. The practical implications of cybernetics for planning was that much greater amounts of information could be mastered than was hitherto possible. The feedback of information would allow a responsiveness to the myriad of diverse and complex choices, similar to that found amongst: "refrigerator manufacturers, colour tv set makers and purveyors of Mediterranean or Caribbean holidays,"⁸⁸ according to Non-Plan. It would make planning participatory, argued the authors, rather than authoritarian and top-down, which was the model that had been practised since the 19th century, and which was neither democratic nor efficient in satisfying the needs it was designed to meet.

It is this emphasis on the kind of forward economic planning engaged in by commercial firms which partly motivated Ben Franks' critique of Non-Plan. Franks argues that Non-Plan's approach was basically Hayekian. Hayek was an early voice of the New Right who rejected social planning because it was "insufficiently flexible to deal with the myriad needs and desires of a large population."⁸⁹ In contrast, Hayek approved of "the spontaneous order created by

⁸⁵ See Nieuwenhuys 1967 for a discussion of the concept

⁸⁶ Banham *et al* 1969 p442

⁸⁷ Banham *et al* 1969 p436

⁸⁸ Banham *et al* 1969 p442

⁸⁹ Franks 2000 p33

individuals obeying certain economic rules, specifically those of the market economy, modifying their behaviour as that of their neighbours and competitors altered.”⁹⁰ Franks suggests that Non-Plan was only in favour of planning which facilitated the activities of individuals operating in the market place: “planning was considered legitimate [if] it was receptive to individual choice” or if engaged in by the state to “encourage further commercial activity, opening up of markets and disbanding planning laws.”⁹¹

When Non-Plan argued that “simply to demand an end to planning, all planning, would be sentimentalism; it would deny the very basis of economic life in the second half of the 20th century,”⁹² it was using the concept of planning in a very general sense which made no distinction between the centrally planned economy of the Soviet Union and the ways in which individual firms make long-term plans for future markets. Nor does Non-Plan have much interest in what might distinguish the centrally-planned, socialist economy from exercises in social control practised by Haussmann, for example. In fact Britain’s social democratic housing programmes received little sympathy either and were characterised as benefiting bureaucratic power in the “housing committees and the respectable working class; they don’t help the poorest, the most fissile or the most drifting families.”⁹³

Franks’ criticism of Non-Plan’s apparently free market orientation does address one of its problems, which was an excessive and naïve belief in the market’s ability to facilitate individual choices. Franks doesn’t recognise that Non-Plan was also attempting to question forms of centralised paternalism which tended to place power in the hands of remote bureaucracies.

Furthermore, Non-Plan was attempting to develop a model which would give individuals some participatory role in the shaping of the physical environment and it did this on the basis of a view of popular culture which Banham and others had pioneered some fifteen years earlier.

⁹⁰ Franks 2000 p33

⁹¹ Franks 2000 p34

⁹² Banham *et al* 1969 p442

Popular culture provided the underlying framework within which Non-Plan was to function. One aspect of this was a participatory aesthetic, one that had been central to Independent Group discussions in the 1950s and which insisted that timeless virtues were not necessarily appropriate qualities in artefacts of mass-consumption. The other element was the notion that pop culture actually produced artefacts which did have desirable and worthwhile qualities. In the view of Non-Plan's authors, pop culture was a significant development and was the most remarkable manifestation of the rising affluence of the post-war world. Pop culture was the product of a newly emergent social group which was generational in character; its impact had been to erode class barriers; it was essentially a "real" culture, provided by people from the same group as its customers; and it was frenetic and immediate, organised around a cycle of rapid obsolescence.⁹⁴

Pop culture was participatory and democratic and it represented the biggest visual explosion in decades (in fashion, in centuries) but its impact on Britain's landscape had been nil, because the planners had suppressed this. Non-Plan ended with an assault on both British archaism and the influence of "outmoded collectivism in left wing thought:"⁹⁵

"We seem to be afraid of freedom. But Britain shouldn't be a Peter Pan Edwardian nursery. Let it at least move into the play school era: why should only the under-sevens be allowed their bright materials, their gay constructions, their wind-up Daleks. In that world, Marx is best known as the maker of plastic, battery driven dump trucks. Let's become that sort of Marxist."⁹⁶

Conclusion

European avant-garde ideas had a significant influence on pop architectural schemes in Britain in the 1960s and there were a number of ways in which a scheme such as the Fun Palace was comparable to more obviously political events such as the LSE occupation and the Anti-hospital. Radical architecture

⁹³ Banham *et al* 1969 p436

⁹⁴ Banham *et al* 1969 p442

⁹⁵ Banham *et al* 1969 p443

drew from the European model and proposed that spaces should have a vital and spontaneous character which could liberate the alienated subject. But radical architecture in Britain also drew from the theory of indeterminacy which had its origins in older ideas about the temporal nature of architecture. Expendability and adaptability might be considered necessary characteristics of any built structure if it were to respond to changing requirements.

The view that architecture should adapt to change was given a particular meaning when it was associated with Britain's modernisation project. Price's Pop-Up-Parliament was an architectural solution to Britain's political and administrative archaism through the incorporation of democratic and participatory elements from within pop culture. Thinkbelt was committed to principles of expendability and adaptability but also made clear that the type of space conventionally associated with university education represented entrenched privilege which was both symptomatic of Britain's archaic class system as well as inappropriate for the nation's economic modernisation and development.

The democratic and participatory element was to come from pop culture in the context of an increasingly affluent society. Whereas early ideas about indeterminacy were concerned to give the architecture a temporal dimension, the indeterminate factor emphasised during the sixties was the varied and complex desires of consumers to whom the physical environment had remained unresponsive.

It is interesting to observe that there was a convergence between the space politics of the European avant-garde, British radical architectural schemes and the anti-institution, in the 1960s. Furthermore, in the latter part of the sixties elements from radical British architecture and design theory began to place a greater emphasis on utility, choice, and expendability (and the American inspired model of the suburb, conceived as democratic space) rather than a more political poetics of space as was to be found in the European (inspired)

⁹⁶ Banham *et al* 1969 p443

model. Does this indicate, as the title of this chapter could be taken to imply, that suburbia rather than the barricades is the legacy of the 1960s?

It could be argued that the consequences of 1968 and the type of politics that emerged in its wake are complex, and it is not helpful to understand these in simplistic terms, as if they had to be one thing or the other. In some respects Non-Plan certainly appears unradical, with its hostility to central planning and its naïve enthusiasm for the market. Non-Plan emphasised the importance of democratic responsiveness in certain areas of consumption (overwhelmingly associated with leisure). The assumption, with hindsight mistaken, was that society would continue to experience rising prosperity and that in such circumstances the benefits of collective provision would be increasingly negated by the clumsiness of its application. What was supposedly the provision of resources to those who needed them was actually the denial of choice to a population now educated in making decisions for themselves, through their experience of pop culture, it was argued. And the context for this was a society where the rich would continue to exercise their choices at the expense of the majority.

It is worth reiterating that both Non-Plan and the more radical forms of space politics with European origins were grounded in assumptions about affluence and that it would continue to rise. For those engaged in a radical and romantic politics and poetics of space, this was the case, as well as for the Non-Planners with their belief in the ability of the market to facilitate democratic choice.

Conclusion

The argument of this thesis has been to suggest that the concept of modernisation provides a powerful means of understanding the underlying dynamics of Britain's history in the 1960s, and that the concept was inextricably linked to the politics of a broadly defined New Left. It has been suggested that modernisation was broader in scope than the more limited project initiated by Wilson's Labour Party in the early 1960s. Revisionists in the Labour Party in the late 1950s, for example, had argued for a thoroughgoing modernisation of Britain's entire moral and ethical apparatus of regulation, which they understood as a necessary and desirable concomitant to broader, structural changes associated with rising prosperity and an (apparently) reformed capitalism. Contrary to the suggestion made in some accounts,¹ the New Left was also enthusiastic for social and cultural modernisation and did not generally share the negative view of these changes found in the writing of Richard Hoggart.

Modernisation was a significant concept for the New Left because the latter's politics were founded within what Alf Louvre has defined as "new kinds of radical synthesis."² One thing which distinguished the new type of radical politics from the politics of the old left was the former's preparedness to recognise the political significance of dress, language, style and various nuances of everyday life. These matters might appear trivial but they were related to more fundamental social and cultural changes which had (apparently) shifted political struggle from its traditional locations in the workplace and the workplace based community to the terrain of consumption. Such a change might be interpreted (as theories of affluence tended to do) as the disappearance of working class culture and ideology (Hoggart's 'Unbending the Springs of Action') but New Left writers such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams did not see it as such. Hall, as early as 1960,³ had maintained that the values of working class culture were not inextricably linked to a type of place.

¹ For example, Sinfield 1989

² Louvre 1992 p45

³ Hall 1960

Williams, in 1957,⁴ had welcomed the acquisition of new commodities which increased the prosperity of a community and helped to breakdown its isolation.

Some New Left writers challenged the validity of a thesis which saw the values and culture of the working class disappearing in the face of structural change; but other social groups, besides the working class, were also significant. The middle class had expanded in size in post-war Britain but also began to fracture into two groups, divided by occupation and economic function, but also culturally and ideologically. The traditional middle class continued to uphold the moral and ethical framework which had predominated before the War but the new (progressive) middle class occupied a very different moral territory. Part of this new group was composed of upwardly mobile individuals who had benefited from the expansion of post-war education (the 'scholarship boy'); part had no previous connection to working class culture but nevertheless identified with selected aspects of it. This was an important group because it constituted a significant element of the New Left's social base and it helped to shape the concerns of that group. In his 1959 discussion of youth subcultures, Stuart Hall had identified those groups which seemed to have a radical potential which was manifest in terms of their identification with particular causes, but which also found expression in their tastes and the types of cultural space they inhabited. According to Bentley, this affirmation by a New Left writer of cultural rather than class-based radicalism constituted an important shift.⁵ Arguably, though, these groups had more of a foundation within the progressive middle class than amongst working class youth.

Bentley's positive assertion of the early New Left's modernising impulse is not a reading adopted by all commentators. Sinfield has identified the alliance of the New Left with the expanded middle class as the former's fundamental characteristic, but considers this to be a problematic relationship. Sinfield regards the New Left as impeded by this association with the dissenting middle class and by the worldview of the latter which it consequently absorbed. This worldview, in Sinfield's estimation, had its origins in the 19th century, was

⁴ Williams 1993

typically hostile to modernisation (in the way that Ruskin was), was liberal in sentiment, but was largely unconcerned about the hegemony of capital. Such a view of the New Left, however, can only be sustained if it is considered to be a phenomenon which ceased to exist in the early sixties and is largely identified with Richard Hoggart and those holding similar opinions. The New Left is distinguished by Sinfield from the counterculture of the later sixties (which he approves of), and there is no consideration of New Left writers in the early sixties who might have had a more positive attitude towards modernisation.

New Left writers from the early sixties of whom Sinfield does approve, however, are Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson whose position towards the dissenting middle class was also sharply critical, if not to so say despairing. In 1964 Perry Anderson published 'Origins of the Present Crisis' ⁶within which he made the case for the exceptional character of British history. The circumstances Britain faced in the sixties could be accounted for in terms of a retarded development which had its origins in the 17th century, Anderson argued. Particularly significant was the problem of the middle class, a social group too weak to sustain power in the face of a powerful aristocracy with which it had then made fateful compromises. That the archaism of Britain's institutions in the 1960s could be explained in these terms was the substance of Anderson's essay.

A certain type of approach to the New Left and its social base tends to ignore these as forces for modernisation, therefore, and to suggest that their lack of orientation towards social and cultural transformation was a consequence of the deficiencies of the middle class. This is not the view of Stuart Hall (as a commentator, now, rather than a participant) who suggested that the progressive middle class had come close to achieving a social hegemony in sixties Britain. Hall argues that many social groups in sixties Britain could be seen to benefit from the process of social and cultural modernisation, but the progressive middle class was at the centre of these transformations. Hall's view provided one starting point for this thesis and each chapter has aimed to demonstrate that if the New Left is defined broadly, it (and its social base) can

⁵ Bentley 2005 p72

be regarded as highly attuned to modernisation, provided the latter is also defined in a broad and inclusive way.

In fact the basis for a broad definition of both the New Left and of the 'modernisation project' (as I define it) is to consider these phenomena in terms of space. This was initially explored in Chapter Two in which it was argued that both Hoggart and the British New Wave established their positions towards post-war social and cultural change geographically and spatially. Whilst Hoggart is commonly regarded as hostile to mass-culture and the New Wave is considered to share this view, the interesting facet of both is their characterisation of the condition of marginality. Hoggart was despairing of those now occupying a space outside of the working class community and on the margins of the lower middle class. The New Wave was sympathetic to the plight of the protagonist who was alienated from contemporary consumer culture but who was also suffocated by the constrictions of the traditional community. Both regarded 'him' as an outsider but it was noted that Hoggart's characterisation of this individual might also indicate someone associated with the emerging counterculture. My conclusion was that not only was the traditional community defined by Hoggart in spatial terms but so was the emerging counterculture. Hoggart's is a very negative view of members of this group and whilst he expressed this negativity in terms of their apparently deplorable cultural tastes and inadequate intellect, the viewpoint was also established by juxtaposing these individuals to those with a more solid place within the working class community.

This whole issue of upward social mobility was deeply significant for the left in the sixties. Whilst the experience of large-scale higher education would produce a more confident cohort of individuals by the mid sixties, Chapter Three suggested that in the course of the 1950s British Pop theory had advocated an approach to popular culture which avoided Hoggart's negative assessment of contemporary, mass-produced cultural forms. Pop theory shared with Hoggart and the British New Wave an interest in the recipients of social and cultural

⁶ Anderson 1992; Sinfield 1989 p42

mobility, but in particular those individuals who actively explored their mobility towards radical ends. Pop theory's origins in the early post-war period were in a reaction to the compromises of orthodox modernism and this essentially avant-garde approach was employed in the 1950s to consider the character of new forms of popular consumption. By the early 1960s, in contrast to Hoggart, spatial dislocation was positively embraced. Whilst one aspect of Pop theory's reappraisal of popular culture allowed for a more satisfactory view of working class culture, another provided for a more adequate view of the recipient of higher education: the concept of the scholarship boy was disarticulated by Reyner Banham and was replaced by an image of a more confident and also culturally radical individual. But, as Pop theory's interesting ideas about cultural competence would suggest, the upwardly mobile radical consumed culture in an avant-garde manner ('he' occupied the interface between the New Left and the counterculture).

Chapter Four argued that competing landscapes of proximity and mobility and a contested national geography were a means through which the merits of social and cultural change were debated. A wide range of literature was focused around the problems of isolation within an immobile society. Whilst some of these modernising accounts wished to see the population engaged with new forms of consumerism, others (Williams, for example) considered the benefits of forms of mechanisation and mobility which could end the isolation and impoverishment of communities. Whilst the proximate landscape continued to be the focus of some cultural representations (in *Coronation Street*, for example) there was widespread enthusiasm for a new culture of mobility represented by the M1. The divide between North and South with its emphasis on place was questioned in the 1960s, partly through Pop theory in the case of Moorhouse's attempt to produce a revised cultural geography: Manchester was criticised for its inward-looking approach and lack of progress in comparison to Birmingham, but Liverpool was praised for its rawness and vitality.

Chapter Five argued that, for the revolutionary left in the late sixties, the problem of socialist advance was bound-up with the role of the intelligentsia, a group which was considered (by Marcuse) to have a strategic position within

new forms of capitalist production. Other New Left critics drew upon the changes perceived to have taken place within generational culture and politics to suggest that students occupied such a role. Marcuse conceived of the radical negation of existing society in terms of an alternative spatialisation. Other approaches drew from Mao, Althusser, Lefebvre and Debord in order to relate student radicalism to the peculiarities of late capitalism and to analyse the new militancy in spatial terms. Student militancy was linked to a broader generational revolt and the (frequently spatial) forms this took in terms of street fashion, rock events, and the cultural style of demonstrations and marches. It was argued that student occupations were also connected to other forms of radicalised space, such as the anti-hospital, the common element being the emotional intensity of the experience of individual spontaneity as boundaries were challenged and authority was undermined.

Such an approach, whilst discussed in theoretical terms by the New Left and practised in the forms of the student occupations and anti-institutions, was also evidenced in architecture: imagined, planned and even built in some instances.

Chapter Six argued that European avant-garde ideas had a significant influence on radical architectural schemes in Britain in the 1960s and there were a number of ways in which a scheme such as the Fun Palace was comparable to more obviously political events such as the LSE occupation and the Anti-hospital. The common approach was that space should have a vital and spontaneous character which could liberate the alienated subject, but radical architecture in Britain also drew from the theory of indeterminacy which had its origins in older ideas about the temporal nature of architecture. The view that architecture should adapt to change was given a particular meaning when it was associated with Britain's modernisation project. Schemes such as the Pop-Up-Parliament were seen as an architectural solution to Britain's political and administrative archaism through the incorporation of democratic and participatory elements from within pop culture. The context for such an approach was one of an increasingly affluent society and the assumption was that the general prosperity would continue to rise. Sixties schemes for architectural indeterminacy culminated in 'Non-Plan,' an approach to the built environment which emphasised choice (exemplified by suburbia, particularly in

its American form), which was contrasted to the paternalism and unresponsiveness of central planning.

The conclusion of the thesis can be summarised in terms of three main areas. The first concerns the value of the concept of modernisation as a means of understanding the underlying dynamics of British history in the 1960s; the second relates to the usefulness of adopting a broad definition of the New Left; the third points towards the concept of space as a powerful means through which a disparate body of historical research, ranging across different social and cultural formations, can be given coherence.

The notion of modernisation was linked in the early sixties to Harold Wilson's programme (and rhetoric) of technological and scientific advance but even in this narrowly conceived form it was always connected to a set of broader social and cultural issues. In part what lay behind this programme was an attempt to build for Labour an electoral base which could include those new social groups which had emerged in the post-war period. Neither manual workers in the old sense of the term, nor members of the traditional middle class, this new subject was imagined as a white coated technician or an intellectual worker. This ideal type has some validity but the new social subject of post-war Britain was not simply a new type of employee but also the bearer of a new and distinctive culture associated with modernisation, a conclusion that might be drawn from Crosland's revisionist programme. In fact the concept of modernisation was a pervasive one in the early 1960s and it exceeded the limitations of its usage in more formal political contexts. It is the conclusion of this thesis that the notion of modernisation has considerable value when exploring the politics of post-war cultural change, particularly when the new modalities of class are examined.

This expanded concept of modernisation is inextricably linked to a broad definition of the New Left. It was the orientation of this broadly defined New Left towards the modernisation of Britain's culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s which distinguished it from older forms of left politics. Those modernisation oriented individuals (Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel) with formal links to new left institutions (such as the *Universities and Left Review*) had, in many respects,

more in common with the theorists of pop than with a traditionally minded figure such as Richard Hoggart. Pop theory provided a sophisticated and sensitive analysis of post-war structural change as well as offering a revisionist critique of prevailing historical narratives of class, which paralleled and extended the concerns of writers such as Stuart Hall. In particular, pop theory provided a new approach to the analysis of popular culture and its relationship to contemporary cultural change.

It is the conclusion of this thesis that this broadly defined New Left produced the most useful insights into the consequences and possibilities of contemporary forms of social and cultural modernisation, as a result of the emphasis it placed on space and spatiality. For this reason a variety of terrains have been explored in this thesis: the enclosed working class community in contrast to landscapes of mobility; the mechanised spaces of pop culture; the geographies and spaces of the North - South divide; and the landscapes and architectures of indeterminacy (exemplified by the Fun Palace, the anti-institution and the student occupations) compared and contrasted to suburbia. These were the terrains upon which the New left's cultural politics can be understood in the 1960s. By outlining the New Left's various approaches to space and spatiality, and by exploring the ways in which these approaches were deployed across a range of cultural and social phenomena, the thesis has suggested a valuable and relatively unexplored way of considering Britain's history in the 1960s.

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