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## A great chaos of sound: alternative practices of working through madness, alienation, and the aesthetics of catastrophe in 60s Britain

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### Abstract

After *Bomb Culture*, Jeff Nuttall's valediction to 1960s relentless anti-system experimentation, what kind of call to order were the Portsmouth Sinfonia's commitment to community DIY practice and Veronica Forrest-Thomson's withdrawal of language from meaning? Nuttall's Laingian references to madness acclaim culture as symptomatic of living with the H-bomb. This essay considers alternative expressions of intimacy and apartness like Doris Lessing's writing on women's madness, the Caribbean Artists Movement's understanding of schizophrenic post-colonial consciousness, and Kate Millet's and Robert Wyatt's eulogies to friends and partners, as marginalized by the aesthetics of catastrophe of Nuttall and his Destruction in Art Symposium colleagues.

### Keywords

Robert Wyatt, Jeff Nuttall, Tina Morris, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Portsmouth Sinfonia, Scratch Orchestra, Cornelius Cardew, Doris Lessing, Kate Millet, Kamau Brathwaite, Caribbean Artists Movement, Savacou, madness, schizophrenia, DIY culture

# **A great chaos of sound: alternative practices of working through madness, alienation, and the aesthetics of catastrophe in 60s Britain**

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## **Introduction**

From 1957 into the 1960s the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's civil disobedience initiatives against the H-Bomb were led first by the Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War (DAC) and then by The Committee of 100. Founding members included playwrights John Osborne and Shelagh Delaney, artist Gustave Metzger, comedian Spike Milligan, and writers John Berger, Stuart Hall, and Doris Lessing. A 1957 J.B. Priestley article in the *New Statesman* protesting "this nuclear madness" provokes CND's formation, while disenchantment with conventional politics and acclamation of collective action is clear from a Committee of 100 policy statement: "We have broken with party politics. We believe in the day-to-day mutual accountability of individuals and groups."<sup>1</sup> This essay looks at writing, art, and music in the 1960s and 70s that developed newly

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<sup>1</sup> "Resistance," Resistance Working Group, West Midlands Committee of 100, British Library Collection, <https://www.bl.uk/learning/images/21cc/counterculture/large8865.html>, accessed 9 February 2020.

fragmented form and urgency out of disappointments following CND's inability to encourage policies towards nuclear disarmament. It asks the extent to which these experiments with catastrophe show an internalization and aesthetic mimicry of Priestley's "nuclear madness," given the widespread feeling of helplessness in effecting change. Evaluating the British counterculture, this essay takes Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture*, titled to suggest a society entirely transfixed and maddened by nuclear threat, as particularly symptomatic of this new anxiety. It evaluates artists allied to Nuttall's anti-academic embrace of instability and outsidership, but argues that a different kind of writer successfully worked through this condition of alienation and madness to achieve alternative modes of an integrated social self. The main strands of the argument focus on three dissociated protagonists running parallel to, and occasionally intersecting with *Bomb Culture*'s iconoclastic milieus. DIY music, women's writing, and Caribbean activism, though not consistently exemplary of the counterculture, did succeed in building new kinds of collectivity, intimacy and disalienation that were seldom attained by more paroxysmal approaches. This essay also proposes that these alternative protagonist voices, often marginalized by more insistently immediate countercultural examples, be given some centrality within the achievements of the time, especially in their resolution of 1960s struggles with mental health.

### **Sick Decade**

Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* was written as a record of ecstatically performing the 60s, a decade characterized in his writing as sickened by the threat of nuclear war. Nuttall was a member of CND and the multiplying cultural heterogeneity of the period prompted him to experience his present as allowing no time for reflection, only for protest, reaction, and motion. *Bomb Culture* invents a hyperbolic narrative, blending idioms and cut-up text where a colorful and frantic garrulousness

sets diary writing about everyday vicissitudes alongside a historical overview of radical cultures. And yet, by the end Nuttall concedes that the directive of the 60s to accelerate and intensify *feeling* might be missing its goal of social and psychic transformation and fears his own literary velocity is not proof enough that social structures are changing at the same frantic pace.

The chapter of *Bomb Culture* titled “Sick” is prefaced by a quote from R.D. Laing, a guiding spirit to the book and often travelling companion in life for the author. Laing perceived a society that provokes mental illness in individuals whose enhanced consciousness provided the truest political diagnosis of current social failings.<sup>2</sup> Here is Laing from *The Politics of Experience*:

What we call ‘normal’ is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being.

The more one sees this, the more senseless it is to continue with generalised descriptions of supposedly specifically schizoid, schizophrenic, hysterical ‘mechanisms.’<sup>3</sup>

In late 50s to early 60s Britain, the expectation of unquestioning social conformity and respect for institutions served to mask the threat of nuclear disaster in an enforced denial of reality.

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<sup>2</sup> In writing on the relation between Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing, Marion Vlastos puts this clearly: “[...] Laing believes it is essential to understand the mad person as symptom and as victim of a sick society and finally as prophet of a possible new world, a world governed by forces of unity rather than of separation.” Marion Vlastos, “Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy,” p246, Modern Language Association, PMLA, Vol. 91, No. 2 (March 1976), pp 245-258.

<sup>3</sup> R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, Pantheon Books: New York, 1967, pp11-12.

This instilled behavior, masking a precarious existence, was analogous to the processes that exacerbated the “divided self” of Laing’s schizoid patients. Rejecting the interrogation of their condition as insensitive misrecognition of their true selves, these patients internalized such unwelcome encounters into a private hermetic theatre of combative personalities, a behavior that only increased the stigmatization of madness.<sup>4</sup> Laing’s therapy was to listen to the unconventional truths spoken by these individuals and, within a supportive community, enabled them to live through their derangements, usually temporary in nature. For Nuttall, Laing’s analytical insights and approaches to therapy enabled an understanding of his own experience of alienation and helped him navigate the turmoil of 60s counterculture. He quotes at length from Laing’s *Politics of Experience*, the key passage being this:

We can no longer assume that such a voyage (schizophrenia) is an illness that has to be treated...Can we not see that *this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Such a schizoid individual in *one* sense is trying to be omnipotent by enclosing within his own being, without recourse to a creative relationship with others, modes of relationship that require the effective presence to him of other people and of the outer world. He would appear to be, in an unreal, impossible way, all persons and things to himself. The imagined advantages are safety for the true self, isolation and hence freedom from others, self-sufficiency, and control.” R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, Pantheon Books: New York, 1960, p77-8.

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, MacGibbon & Kee: London, 1968, p120.

For Nuttall the unconventional attitudes and behaviour of the British “Underground” expressed truths about the conditions of nuclear threat and the ensuing realization of imminent annihilation. The classification of these attitudes as mad, irresponsible, or threatening only manifested repression of what was a perfectly sane reaction to an intolerable reality:

To a certain degree, the Underground happened everywhere spontaneously. It was simply what you did in the H-bomb world if you were, by nature, creative and concerned for humanity as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

Nuttall’s own poetry seems less concerned with “humanity as a whole” than with the celebration of an obsessively erotic male realm of fungible women. His verse moves quickly, reflective thought making way for testimonies of machine-like coitus. Its percussive sonic quality is sexualized with such unashamed masculinity as to radiate misogyny.<sup>7</sup> In this poetry, sexual adventurousness is an ontological condition of engaged living in the 60s. Influenced by his frequent meetings with William Burroughs, Nuttall uses cut-up processes, intensified language, and plentiful fecund rural imagery to convey an erotic frenzy as the kind of anti-disciplinarity he

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p170.

<sup>7</sup> “I drove her for centuries / Nailed her down on the cast-brass walls of sun / Her clanking menstrual coinage / Poured in a fruit machine spill / Down the chute of the phallic shaft / In return for my milk of acid / And my eyesockets toothsockets quick cunt throat / Croaked: ‘Burn us with punishing gladness. / Haven’t we loved to the bone? What else do you want? / Light light us — show glare in the final frame / Fire-flayed frame naked splayed / Song sucked from stretched necks / Sap from cut cacti. Eat!’” Jeff Nuttall, “Lightning Sequence,” *Poems 1962-69*, Fulcrum Press: London, 1970, p68.

feels is most attuned to the decade. A sense of male entitlement depicts the female body as landscape, or rather territory, to be explored, celebrated, exploited and fought over.<sup>8</sup> Where women's bodies and minds are the causalities, his artist colleague Mark Boyle's comment that art "should be waged like war and how, according to all the strategists, you had to locate the enemy and evaluate your own forces and assess the terrain and clarify your objectives and work out your strategy"<sup>9</sup> might equally express Nuttall's sentiments, his penis objectified in a hundred different ways as tool, serpent, shaft, "a coloured phallus like a Roman / candle, like a mortal pestle, Mr. Punch's club."<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommend me for psychiatric treatment—Nuttall's People Show**

Nuttall's finest hour has to concern the scripts he wrote from 1967 onwards for People Show, a long-running series of ensemble performances, sometimes classified as happenings. More ludic and much odder than his poetry, the scripts gained from Nuttall's restless invention of ways to

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<sup>8</sup> That this sexism doesn't entirely obscure Nuttall's achievements indicates the nuanced and complex role he played in 60s poetics and cultural activism: "Perhaps most importantly, besides being a significant poet, artist, performer and polemicist in his own right, as Michael Horowitz commented, Nuttall was a cultural *catalyst* in that he facilitated others through his various projects." Gillian Whiteley, "Jeff Nuttall's Carnival of Discord," *Cusp: Recollections of Poetry in Transition*, Shearsman Books: Bristol, 2012, p64.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Boyle, *Journey to the Surface of the Earth: Mark Boyle's Atlas and Manual*, Edition Hansjorg Mayer: Cologne, 1970, unpaginated.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *Colchester train. 28 October 1967, Poems*, p88.



engage, provoke, alienate, and entertain audiences. Writing on that period ten years later, Nuttall was frank about the challenges of his negotiations with the audiences and, just as often, with his performers whose modifications to the scripts would, in his opinion, reduce their abrasiveness and agency. People Show originated in explicit opposition to mainstream theatre and acting techniques to determine more effective ways of challenging audience preconceptions. Nuttall's directions frequently required actors to be planted in the audience, to handle visitors, to berate them verbally and assail them with stage props. Although desperate for actors, when an opportunity to recruit from the cast of Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade* falls through, Nuttall was relieved not to have to turn for help to a fashionable scene that, he asserted, spice up their otherwise moribund practices by borrowing from Artaud and Grotowski. A surfeit of "skill" was Nuttall's chosen term to distinguish the problematically constrained horizon of his contemporaries' work from his own inventions. He was the audacious visionary pitted against stolid craftsmen who felt their hard-won abilities threatened by an unpredictable iconoclastic chancer. Out of this distaste for conventional stagecraft was formed an exemplary DIY performance group whose first imperfect production in 1966 at Powys, Wales, involved props and actions often revived in later performances—strawberry jam spread on newspapers, nudity, a plastic sheet pulled over the audience, and loud jazz.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> These DIY approaches also find advocacy from Laing: "Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest, and in conformity with common sense, is pitifully limited: our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of un-learning is necessary for anyone before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love."

R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p9.

The scripts are often a tour-de-force of verbal pyrotechnics imagining a threshold of the madness and criminality that Nuttall makes a centerpiece of *Bomb Culture*. There are personifications of the Moors Murderers, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, in *The Cultural Reorientation of the Working Class* (February 1968), and of schizophrenia in *The Railings in the Park* (September 1968). In some of the writing there is a strong influence of Music Hall double entendre and slapstick, as well as of 60s absurdist trad jazz performers like The Alberts (with Bruce Lacey) and Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band:

WEE TREE. All the nice girls love a candle.

All the nice girls love a wick.

Because there's something about a candle

That reminds you of a

Mr. SLY. Prickling at the base of the scalp.

Clammy palms in the small dawns of the generations.

Oh what is to become of us?<sup>12</sup>

Nuttall's technique of incessantly juxtaposing dissociated imagery drew on Lautremont<sup>13</sup> and was driven by his disappointment at a decade's loss of affect after the failure of CND and of

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<sup>12</sup> Jeff Nuttall, "The Cultural Reorientation of the Working Class," *Volume 2 Performance Art: Scripts*, John Calder: London, 1979, p69.

<sup>13</sup> In happenings the use of language, actors, and actions as found objects takes after Surrealist enthusiasms: "[the found object] As a startling juxtaposition [...] Thus Lautremont's original

protests against the Vietnam War:<sup>14</sup> A proliferation of non-sequitur rhymes suggesting Cockney Music Hall patter only increases the sense of dislocated meaning and slippage into madness:

MURIEL.     Body’s a slum...

MARK.        Is that the lot?

SYD.          ...Fat and hot...

LAURA.       Well it is a bit grotty.

SYD.          Gritty and knotty...

MARK.        You mean to tell me—

LAURA.       Makes your thumb wet.

SYD.          Slake the sunset...

MARK.        That the only reason—

LAURA.       Nasty and cold on me nipples.

MURIEL.      Whole of me ripples.

MARK.        —you recommend me for psychiatric treatment—

LAURA.       And you should read something besides comics.

MARK.        Ah, comics as well.

SYD.          Chronic, the smell...

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‘chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on the dissecting table.’” Jeff Nuttall, *Volume 1 Performance Art: Memoirs*, John Calder: London, 1979, p25.

<sup>14</sup> “I was not interested in any theatre that gave people the immunity of darkness and anonymity. I was not concerned to perform to voyeurs. I wasn’t reviving Dada and the Theatre of Cruelty. I was these things.” Nuttall, *Volume 1 Performance Art*, p29.

LAURA.       Korky the bloody Cat.  
MARK.         But these things don't matter.  
MURIEL.       Body in tatters....  
LAURA.       Desperate fuckin' Dan.  
MARK.         No reason to call a man a failure.  
MURIEL.       Fatal allure...<sup>15</sup>

Interested in a suggestion by Edward Lucie-Smith “to take a piece of behaviour and lift it out of context as an isolated found object,”<sup>16</sup> Nuttall’s scripts pushed the idea of a display of living sculptures to an extreme. Criticized that People Show alienated, rather than brought theater to the general public, Nuttall reminded his critics that the lack of a possessive noun in the group’s name indicated that it was a show *of*, and not *for*, people. In *A Nice Quiet Night* from 1967, stage instructions had Laura Gilbert for the second half of the performance “*half dressed and dishevelled, [...] hanging (upside down) on a wall*”<sup>17</sup> and delivering a monologue of fractured consciousness. At the start of their inaugural performance in October 1966, at Better Books basement, a breast, stomach, and legs of three actors were visible poking through screens. For the opening five minutes of *Strawberry Jam*, January 1967, Mark Long and Syd Palmer crawled around the feet of the audience while wearing piles of old coats, before the latter screamed Nuttall’s attempt to correct viewer indifference:

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<sup>15</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *The Railings in the Park, Volume 2 Performance Art: Scripts*, John Calder: London, 1979, p50.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *Volume 1 Performance Art*, p26.

<sup>17</sup> Jeff Nuttall, “A Nice Quiet Night,” *Volume 2 Performance Art*, p31.

COULDN'T YOU WAIT FOR PIGS' FEEDING TIME?  
WERE YOUR SAGGING BELLIES SO VOID YOU COULDN'T LEAVE IT  
ANOTHER MINUTE? [...]  
YES YOU CAME IN WITH OUR SPOONS AND D'YOU KNOW WHAT IT FELT  
LIKE CUTTING YOUR SIDE? SHALL I TELL YOU? IT FELT LIKE THE DIVISION  
OF LOVERS ONE FROM ANOTHER AND IT FELT LIKE THE BOMB'S GOING TO  
FEEL NEXT WEEK. [...]<sup>18</sup>

### **Burntoutness—absurdity and destruction in visual art**

Where *Bomb Culture* credits the antagonistic material procedures of Nuttall's partner artists as the direct embodiment of destabilized psychic health their work repays a closer look. Key makers of Nuttall's symptomatic art include his close working associates John Latham and Bruce Lacey, as well as other participants in the September 1966 Destruction of Art Symposium (DIAS) like Mark Boyle (then working with Joan Hills), David Medalla, and Gustav Metzger, the early DAC and Committee of 100 member. Metzger had been dissolving nylon sheets with acid as early as 1960 when the relation of his art processes to anti-nuclear protests would have been immediately evident.<sup>19</sup> Intending an emphasis on action rather than product, Metzger organized DIAS to include

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<sup>18</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *Strawberry Jam, Volume 2 Performance Art*, p24.

<sup>19</sup> "In the context of the possible wipe-out of civilization, the study of aggression in man, and the psychological, biological and economic drives to war, is possibly the most urgent work facing man. A central idea of Destruction in Art Symposium was to isolate the element of destruction in new art forms, and to discover any links with destruction in society." Gustav Metzger, "Excerpts

around 50 artists across venues in London, centered on a three-day symposium at Africa Centre. In his essay “Poetics of Dissent: Notes on a Developing Counterculture in London in the Early Sixties”<sup>20</sup> Andrew Wilson discusses the DIAS organizing committee members to indicate the broad sweep of kinetic, spatial, and textual implications of this event. These included theater director Jim Haynes who later opened the Arts Lab in Drury Lane where People Show staged early performances; the cybernetic artist and art education pioneer Roy Ascott (amongst whose students are Brian Eno and Pete Townsend); and the concrete poet Bob Cobbing who was as important a facilitator of others’ work as he was a contributing artist and theorist. It was in the basement of Cobbing’s Better Books that People Show first performed.

At this time Boyle and his family were in the process of making 1,000 replicas of land surfaces at randomly selected global locations. These hyperreal Epikote resin casts developed from Boyle’s profoundly troubled conviction of the persistence of subjectivity in his work. Elaborate procedures were set up for preventing this from happening, most notably by having work sites selected by blindfolded audience members firing darts at a world map.

And how can you offer explanations? You can say “I’ve tried to make my work as objective as possible, as far as I can be sure there’s nothing of me in there,” but you must always

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from selected papers presented at the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium,” *Studio International*, December 1966, p282.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Art & the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, Tate Publishing: London, 2014, pp92-111.

have the suspicion that although each individual work is entirely random, the whole project, and the desire and determination to do it, are deeply subjective...<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the 60s Boyle's desire to disappear was regularly explored in performances. The whole world (exemplified by the Epikote casts) was up for dispassionate scrutiny. Much as with Nuttall's exhibited people, entire cities and their inhabitants were described by Boyle as if they were zoo specimens to be studied.

[*Notes On Requiem for an Unknown Citizen* is] a random biological examination of any community anywhere. [...] it is designed as a research programme to amass information on how these creatures (for example the animals Glasgow, London or Berlin) survive, how they support themselves, breathe, feed, think, move, excrete, reproduce and adapt.<sup>22</sup>

Boyle intended *Requiem* as a representation, or better re-creation, of fairly random encounters provoked by the text score, or what he called here 'notes.' The intent was for the performances to be almost indistinguishable from what, as objectively as possible, they represented. Consider note 7 (1): "A group of actors or dancers present relationships, discoveries and events that occurred at a building (selected at random with a dart in a map) when, using some ruse, they went there and maybe the people were talking about the fabric of the house and locality."<sup>23</sup>

John Latham participated in the *sTigma* project in Better Books through which Nuttall hoped to induce physiological revulsion in the audience. Wilson writes that "Nuttall's

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Boyle, *Journey to the Surface of the Earth: Mark Boyle's Atlas and Manual*, edition Hansjorg Mayer: London, 1970, unpaginated.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, Appendix 20, unpaginated.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, unpaginated.

collaborators went on to create a violent iconography of war atrocities, pornography, bodily abjection and mechanised totemic sexualised depravity, which he termed as an ‘experience’ rather than an exhibition and which was ‘designed to make people feel more.’”<sup>24</sup> Presumably Latham was at the center of these iconoclasms having incorporated burnt and painted books in his art since 1958. Given his intent to short circuit the ways that knowledge was esteemed and transferred, it was understandable that Latham’s declarations and diagrams were diversionary. The nonsensical logorrhea of his artist statement “The Life and Death of Great Uncle” that appeared in Lawrence Alloway’s *Gazette No. 2* in 1960 was characteristic: “There followed a phonological interpretation of just about any piece of pie you care to open up, most interesting for us today perhaps being the theory of unmechanised gubernation.”<sup>25</sup> Quoting Latham’s comment on “the burntoutness of the verbal western tradition,” catalogue authors Rosetta Brooks and John Stezaker link his violent modification of books by plastering, painting, or burning to an avant-gardist disaffection.

The trap which Latham sets is in the presentation of things with which we conventionally have some subjective involvement in a way which denies it. He presents our literate civilisation as though a lost or rediscovered one.<sup>26</sup>

Even for someone like Nuttall, the extent of Latham’s iconoclasm was a liability. During a retreat Nuttall had organized at Brazier’s Park in Oxfordshire Latham destroyed a valuable book by its

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *Art & the 60s*, pp98.

<sup>25</sup> John Latham, “The Life and Death of Great Uncle,” *State of Mind: John Latham*, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1975, pp16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Rosetta Brooks and John Stezaker, *State of Mind*, , p30.



incorporation into an unauthorized mural.<sup>27</sup> How might such destabilisations of “sane” art processes be effective as symptoms exposing the sickness that has to be overcome? Did DIAS aesthetics enable affirmative social diagnoses or moments of curative enlightenment, or was the acutely symptomatic nature of this mad art a self-fulfilling sufficiency?

Ken Russell’s affectionate 1962 fifteen-minute black-and-white portrait of Bruce Lacey shows the artist acting cameos in deadpan pastiches of Edwardian entertainments and playing a Dr. Frankenstein of the junkyard, making assemblages that jerk and gasp their way towards an exhausted half-life. Lacey’s work bemusedly repurposes the tawdry residue of his recent ancestors to remind us of their ridiculous vanities. Russell’s remark that “What he particularly relishes are those forlorn objects that are too old-fashioned for use and not yet ancient enough for museums” could apply to much of the Music Hall revivalism of the decade. In a recent film by Jeremy Deller and Nick Abrahams, Lacey explains “I create scenarios of things that might have happened.”

It is challenging nowadays to fathom what it was that so fascinated 50s and 60s listeners and viewers about this kind of manic absurdist comedy as it paid homage to Music Hall and early cinema. Well before it impacted Nuttall’s experimental theatre, this genre of anti-institutional

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<sup>27</sup> “A smell woke me up. On the stairs it was stronger, a cheap scented chemical kind of smell. [...] John Latham met me with a staring eye. There’s something about Latham at such moments that is mad beyond madness. A staring immovable shocked and shocking inner violence. Latham had taken a book [...] stuck it to the wall with Polyfilla, and shot black Aerosol all over book and wall in a big explosion of night. That was the smell.” Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, p227.

comedy influenced the Goon Show and The Alberts.<sup>28</sup> Nuttall was adamant that the Goon Show emerged as a riotous critique of the British National Service. Both ran contemporaneously throughout the 1950s and ended together in 1960.<sup>29</sup> Not only were the Goons “every National

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<sup>28</sup> With *The Temperance Seven*, The Alberts were at the eccentric end of British trad jazz of the early 60s and worked with Bruce Lacey and Spike Milligan. In *Psychodelia and Other Colours* Rob Chapman explains the trad phenomenon as an island fascination for what is far away, in this case New Orleans jazz and Delta blues. The intensity of this attraction is evident from Michael Horowitz’s tribute: “Jazz: sacred river, deeply embedded in the American idiom, was a seminal influence for many of us: underground movement, living mythology and international language of our upbringing: which addressed its primal messages to the whole world – & through which all could speak. The opening frontiers that evolved when negro delta essence welled has fused (with astonishingly little confusion) word and music writers, performers, listeners & readers into instantaneous connexion – however widely dispersed in ethnic, musical and literary traditions.” Michael Horowitz, *Children of Albion: Poetry of the ‘Underground’ in Britain*, Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1969, *Afterwords*, pp328-9. In 1986 *The Alberts—An Evening of British Rubbish* documented a revival of a 1963 hugely successful stage show of musical and slapstick sketches often in Edwardian costume. Commentary in the program described The Alberts as creating “a completely anarchic attitude to the theatre” with “a kind of crazy amateurish love of British music hall.”

<sup>29</sup> From “The Phantom Head-Shaver,” broadcast 15 October 1954 are these lines from the buffoonish Major Denis Bloodnok: “I tell you, sir, the Phantom wouldn’t *dare* come near here — not with old Bloodnok on duty [...] What? Ohh, tunned, aeioughhhh — bleiough! Aeioughhhh

Serviceman’s defense mechanism” but they “provided us all with schizoid subterfuges, vocal disguises.”<sup>30</sup> Given continuing anger at inveterate institutions and authority figures, and the anxiety and pessimism about nuclear stockpiling, this sort of accelerated visual and sonic humor provided easily recognisable critical parody. Yet Britain’s geographic and cultural isolation, where limited immigration was met with disproportionate racism, provided a shielding function for such heavily coded nonsense and reassuring Victorian and Edwardian citations. It is astonishing how glacially the internationalism and avant-gardist drive of the 60s counterculture impacted this kind of comedy.

Rob Chapman traces the profound influence of Music Hall on some of that decade’s most interesting pop music, noting how The Kinks, The Who, Cream, and Small Faces all drew on Edwardian entertainment while the totally forgettable New Vaudeville Band topped the UK charts with “Winchester Cathedral.”<sup>31</sup> Chapman argues that the best of these revivals complicated lyrical content and subversively popularized the social and cultural revolution of the 60s while paying tribute to an anti-authoritarian working class performance tradition. The Beatles’ 1967 *Magical Mystery Tour* film revived these same tropes of a reassuringly dependable nostalgia, including an officious military sergeant, a working class coach trip, a visit to a Newquay beach (a historic holiday resort), a striptease and, above all, the mass ballroom dance choreography of “Your Mother Should Know” whose lyrics pine for Edwardian songs. *Magical Mystery Tour* was avid

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bleioughh ohhhhhh, tunned me gronkers with a gritclub — Ohhh ohhh ooohhh ohhhh ohhh ohhh ohhhhhh.” Spike Milligan, *The Goon Show Scripts*, The Woburn Press: London, 1972, p53.

<sup>30</sup> Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, p124.

<sup>31</sup> Rob Chapman, *Psychedelia and Other Colours*, Faber & Faber: London, 2015, p417.

intergenerational family Christmas viewing on its first broadcast, at least up to the striptease act that was accompanied by Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band playing “Death Cab For Cutie.”

Watching the early episodes of *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, a predecessor to *Monty Python* that began in 1967, the faltering struggles to make something truly tradition-smashing out of that Music Hall legacy are evident. There are some clever comic ideas buried within overly familiar slapstick vaudevillian routines and, as house musicians, the Bonzos sometimes bring an edgy unpredictability to their trad jazz performances, most notably with a startlingly manic version of “The Sound of Music.” However, the Bonzos’ ill-conceived blackface limbo performance of their lazy calypso parody “Look Out There’s A Monster Coming” shows how thin is this anti-system veneer that embellishes a rigidly homogenous racial normativity and neo-colonial ignorance. Nor does Nuttall escape this bigotry, for in *Changes*, written in 1969, his script instructs the character Roland to tell a number of jokes that insult no less than three minority groups.<sup>32</sup> Chapman recalls commentary on the essential conservatism of Music Hall performance where extremes of social and economic difference are parodied but nevertheless accepted as unalterable.<sup>33</sup> Broadcast only months before Member of Parliament Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” April 1968 speech that stirred up racial hatred, the Bonzos’ musical and makeup choices, as well as Nuttall’s thoughtless stage instruction, reveal the habitual prejudices that confront immigrants from the newly independent colonies. The entertainer’s gaze here is inward-looking, a self-deprecating English isolationism, reassuringly bolstered by eccentricity yet also profoundly insensitive.

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<sup>32</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *Performance Art Memoirs*, John Calder Ltd.: London, 1979, p43.

<sup>33</sup> Chapman, *Psychedelia and Other Colours*, p433.

## Doing it themselves—community in music

By necessity, contemporary music at the end of the 60s was one area harnessing community to move beyond Nuttal's *Bomb Culture* instability experiments. The Portsmouth Sinfonia was a relatively structured, chaste, and sober initiative where a sizable orchestra, primarily comprising non-musicians, organized themselves to practice playing classical and pop standards from conventional scores. The Sinfonia had formed in the wake of Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra which, in the same period, convened musically capable and inexpert individuals to perform *The Great Learning*, a seven-part composition comprising text scores and conventional notation.

After the disorderly 60s might entities like the Portsmouth Sinfonia and the Scratch Orchestra, with their unlikely conjoining of amateurism and indeterminacy in structured performances, signal a kind of *rappel a l'ordre* also revealed by other cultural examples? From 1969 the interest of Portsmouth College of Art students like Ian Hays<sup>34</sup> in hybrid approaches to

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<sup>34</sup> “Yes, I was a member of the Portsmouth Sinfonia in 1969 with other students from the then Portsmouth School of Art and Design. As an idea the intention has always been perverted and presented as a project that was essentially concerned with making very bad music – when in fact the presentation in performance was that of musicians practicing the musical pieces they had in front of them – it was this ‘practice’ that was on stage and not the typical polished performance. A simple idea that has symbolic meaning strongly connected with the lives of ordinary people.” Ian Hays, May 6, 2019, responding to “Meet the World’s Worst Orchestra, The Portsmouth Sinfonia, Featuring Brian Eno,” no author credited, November 14, 2017, *Open Culture*,

musical experimentation was facilitated by teachers and visitors such as Gavin Bryars, John Tilbury and Cardew. Writing in 1973, Brian Eno explains on the sleeve notes for *Portsmouth Sinfonia Plays the Popular Classics* “It is important to stress the main characteristic of the orchestra: that all members of the Sinfonia share the desire to play the pieces as accurately as possible.”<sup>35</sup> From Jeffrey Steele’s retrospective comments in a 1976 *Studio International* issue, devoted to the confluence of art and experimental music, we learn that those Portsmouth students getting involved in the Sinfonia placed a high value on the need to start with a disciplined and trained collaborative enterprise before being able to play their instruments or grapple with music theory.<sup>36</sup> This prioritization of organizing a performing community ahead of learning musical skills responds in its particular way to Robert Wyatt’s bemused lyric in “Thank You Pierrot Lunaire” from Soft Machine’s second album, *Volume Two*, released in 1969: “But I still can’t see why people listen, instead of doing it themselves.”<sup>37</sup> Those anxious to get beyond passive spectatorship of an increasingly commodified alternative musical and theater culture had to invent new collective ways to get there.

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<http://www.openculture.com/2017/11/meet-the-worst-orchestra-in-the-world-the-portsmouth-sinfonia-featuring-brian-eno.html>, accessed 3 June 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Eno, *Portsmouth Sinfonia Plays the Popular Classics*, Columbia Records: New York, 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey Steele, “Collaborative Work at Portsmouth,” *Studio International, Art & Experimental Music*, November/December 1976, p298.

<sup>37</sup> “Thank You Pierrot Lunaire,” *The Soft Machine Volume Two*, Probe Records, 1969.

In an idiosyncratic and idealistic mutation, this desire of audiences to become producers informs the culmination of Jacques Attali's *Noise* as it recounts music's history entwined with political power and commerce. Through "composition" passive audiences become collectively organized performers: "The Jimi Hendrix Experience inspires dreams, but it does not give one the strength to put its message into practice, to use the musicians' noise to compose one's own order. [...] Music is no longer to be represented or stockpiled, but for participation in collective play, in an ongoing quest for new, immediate communication."<sup>38</sup> While it is tempting to associate these comments of Attali's with the emergence of punk there's no sign of his awareness of that phenomenon. Instead Attali's focus on African American free jazz as a model for what "composition" might become if it is truly independent from commerce links his argument back to the efforts of late-60s musicians like Wyatt, deeply affected by artists such as Ornette Coleman and Archie Shepp, to find independent platforms and new audiences for their experimentation.<sup>39</sup>

As if anticipating Attali's concern, Wyatt's puzzled comment—"instead of doing it themselves"—revealing a band struck by their audience's inertia, was part of the lyrics of a song about his recent experiences touring with The Jimi Hendrix Experience: "Thank you Noel and

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<sup>38</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, (1977), University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1985, p137-141.

<sup>39</sup> "In 1945, the year I was born, Miles Davis made his first record with Charlie Parker. As much as I love everything beforehand in jazz, from Duke Ellington back to Louis Armstrong, I feel that these are my people; this is where I come in." Robert Wyatt quoted in Marcus O'Dair, *Different Every Time*, Serpent's Tail: London, 2015, p33.

Mitch / Thank you Jim for our exposure to the crowd.”<sup>40</sup> In early years Soft Machine always had a DIY approach to putting music together. Wyatt was certainly listening to a lot of jazz and soul, but really as a provocation to doing it himself. The song distinctions on *Volume Two* are misleading. Strongly advised by their record company to break up the long tracks into manageable segments, the band just slotted in titles while keeping the music continuous. Perhaps their sometime regretted approach of amateurishly throwing the music together for studio recordings, and then figuring out while touring how to really play it, was common to other bands of the period. Given the length and intensity of their recent tour with Hendrix, they may not have had much alternative. The grinding schedule of LP production and follow-up promotional tour will have left little time for practice sessions, but even Soft Machine were taken aback by the extent of Syd Barrett’s DIY unpreparedness when invited to participate in some recordings. Barrett had been the founder and central inventive force of Pink Floyd, but Wyatt’s remarks touch on the schizophrenia, likely exacerbated by continuous LSD use, that led to Barrett’s replacement in the band after just one album. As he explained:

I thought they were rehearsals! We’d say “What key is that in Syd?” and he’d say “Yeah.” Or “That’s funny Syd, there’s a bar of two and a half beats and then it seems to slow up and then there’s five beats there” and he’d go “Oh, really?.” And we just sat there with the tape running, trying to work it out, when he stood up and said “Right, thank you very much.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Thank You Pierrot Lunaire,” *The Soft Machine Volume Two*, 1969.

<sup>41</sup> Michael King, *Wrong Movements: A Robert Wyatt History*, SAF Publishing: Wembley, 1994, unpaginated, May 3, 1969.



The ability to play in key or hold a rhythm wasn't as important as bringing some delicacy and ingenuity to keep this slip of a song on its feet. Between musicians, hospital, and family members the kind of supportive community more or less envisaged by Laing was in place for the remainder of Barrett's life. Reviving Laing's terms, it feels brutal to suggest that Barrett's "voyage (schizophrenia)" was its own form of healing as he recovered neither his former sociability nor capabilities. Yet since listening is what Laing asks us to do for someone with mental illness, we can hear in Barrett's lyrics an alarmingly proximate image and linguistic identification with other species that comes close to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari later define as the threshold-crossing condition of "becoming-animal," itself an imaginative and sympathetic reevaluation of the contours of mental illness. Here is an example from Barrett's 1970 "Wolfpack": "Howling the pack in formation appears / Diamonds and clubs, light misted fog, the dead / Waving us back in formation."

Soft Machine participated in the 1967 Edinburgh Festival accompanying a performance of *Ubu in Chains* by Traverse Theatre Company, with Mark Boyle's light projections, where they "blast away on electronic organs and guitars, enormously amplified so that the hall vibrates."<sup>42</sup> Boyle developed his light events alongside Soft Machine performances as DIY experiments, at one time even using his body fluids as mediums through which the colored lights were projected: "you think about Mike Ratledge and Robert and Kevin and Hugh and working with the Soft Machine and their shattering, acetylene music and how can anyone hear it live and then ask for explanations. [...] The head is drenched with thoughts and images that supersede one another with

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<sup>42</sup> Allen Wright, *The Scotsman*, in King, *Wrong Movements*, Sep 3, 1967.

such rapidity that writing and even speaking become intolerable [...].”<sup>43</sup> Performances as intense as these encouraged Boyle’s conviction that he should dissolve his subjectivity in conceding the need “to accept everything”<sup>44</sup> as a way of enabling the world to come into view: “You don’t want any image, you want to be transparent, a projection almost seen on a cloud of cigarette smoke.”<sup>45</sup>

By this time Soft Machine were close enough to Alfred Jarry’s ideas to feel confident discussing Pataphysics<sup>46</sup> and even receiving the “Ordre De La Grand Gidouille,” a possibly spurious award, from the French Pataphysical Society. This congenial phase was brief however, for by Soft Machine’s 1970 double album *Third* the band were performing the four sides straight through without a word to each other or the audience, and by the time *Fourth* was released in 1971 Wyatt had been pushed out of the band who were then engaged in their own return to order, discarding intoxicated eccentric vocals and wayward musical arrangements for an increasingly disciplined, and predictable, jazz-rock fusion.

In reality this was the moment the paroxysmal counterculture was overtaken by models of collective action focused on social well being, largely pioneered through the feminist and Black

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Boyle, *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Boyle, Control Magazine, 1966, excerpted in *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*

<sup>45</sup> Mark Boyle, *Journey to the Surface of the Earth* .

<sup>46</sup> From keyboard player Mike Ratledge’s retrospective look: “Pataphysics is the science of imagining solutions, theory of exceptions [...]. There are numerous philosophies that belong to that school of thought, such as false science and artistic science, dealing with the imagining machines, just dealing wholly with ideas, the artistic possibilities of science. We were all heavily into it.” King, *Wrong Movements*, Oct (early) 1967.

Power movements. It was this shift in focus out of which the Sinfonia emerges, for an orchestra, even of inept players, must be attuned to one another's playing and care for each other. By the time of Wyatt's *The End of an Ear* in 1970, every song was dedicated to a close friend—Bridget St. John, Daevid Allen, Carla Bley, and others. In *Rock Bottom*, from 1974 following the accident that prevents him from any further drumming, Wyatt eulogized his partner Alfreda Bengé whose artwork is on the record cover.

I'm not your larder,  
I'm your dear little dolly.  
But when plops get too helly  
I'll fill up your belly.  
I'm not your larder,  
I'm Alife your guarder.<sup>47</sup>

What other 60s legacies carry forward to affect the procedures used by the Portsmouth Sinfonia? Boyle's attempt at objectivity, where neither will nor subjectivity must separate the representation from the thing itself in the world, invites comparison with the Sinfonia's aim to "play the pieces as accurately as possible" without interpreting, without skill, without expression. The score, or in the case of those unable to read music, the memory of the notes and melody, was the thing to be rendered as dispassionately as possible by the performance. Boyle's optimistic statement "I have tried to cut out of my work any hint of originality, style, superimposed design, wit, elegance or significance"<sup>48</sup> could have applied just as effectively to the Sinfonia.

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Wyatt, "Alife," *Rock Bottom*, Virgin Records, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Boyle, *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*, Appendix 1b, notes.

The Portsmouth Sinfonia was committed to tolerating performers' repeatedly imperfect contributions clustering noisily around a sometimes barely recognizable trace of a melody. It seems that their orchestra provided a community template for drawing together all the combative personalities that Laing identified as the schizoid individual's cacophonous reality. As a tolerance for mad sound the Sinfonia's return to order was very much in synchrony with its time. It was an invitation, even a kind of post-Cage openness, to consider the revelatory capacity of sounds previously deemed non-communicative or disruptive. The Sinfonia embrace the mad performance of intolerable noise, where all errant contributions are sonically valuable as constellations of difference unpredictably orbiting around a common idea. It was a path to new insights, ones more fitting for a destabilized present. Clearly the Portsmouth Sinfonia was one genealogical branch of this determination to present performers and actions as living sculptures. What more unusual readymade than an entire found orchestra imperfectly performing found scores and songs?

The Sinfonia's development out of, and perhaps in spite of, the contested curricular structures of an English art school was significant for the time, since accumulating pressures were driving these institutions towards increasingly organized learning and the professionalization of their students. The Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD) was introduced in 1960 to enable greater academicisation and standardisation of studies. From 1965 some art schools started to merge with larger polytechnics while numerous others closed down. Now required by the DipAD to take classes in histories of art and design as well as complementary studies, students sometimes found these changes resisted by studio staff, even if they themselves recognized the value. Towards the end of the 60s vigorous debates about these changes were conducted in art magazines like *Studio International* where, for example, in the same July/August 1968 issue we find Hornsey art students, then on strike, acclaiming the benefits of their anti-institutional reinvention of autonomous

learning, while experienced educators Elma Askham Thurbron and Harry Thubron argued the benefits of the new polytechnics. Laying out their vision for a radically interdisciplinary art education, the Thubrons stated that the larger structure of the polytechnics “would allow for collective endeavour (ritual) of staffs and students. Such a unit would require, for example, a Physicist, Engineer, Musician, Artist, teacher of Movement and Dance, as well as members of the Central Core (Liberal Studies so called) actually being on the ground in the workshops as and when required.”<sup>49</sup>

Although such visions anticipate the Sinfonia’s attempts to integrate art and music, that Portsmouth initiative seems as much a call for a new kind of indiscipline as for interdisciplinarity. The Sinfonia’s highly structured approach to underachievement also resisted the twofold instrumentalizing of art education that Alexander Massouras saw occurring in the 60s to serve the needs of galleries wanting to work with emerging young artists as well as the demands of teaching professions for energetic new staff.<sup>50</sup>

Attempts during the 60s to set up alternative institutions play a part in the intellectual debates and disagreements around these huge structural changes in publicly funded art school education. Involving poets from the International Poetry Incarnation a year earlier, The London Free School

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<sup>49</sup> Elma Askham Thubron and Harry Thubron, “Art through education,” *Studio International*, July/August 1968, pp5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Massouras, “The Art of Art Students,” *The London Art Schools: Reforming the Art World, 1960 to Now*, Tate Publishing: London, 2015. Massouras also points to the increasing visibility, and thus professionalization, of the New Contemporaries exhibition of student work that was held at the Tate in 1967.

formed in Notting Hill in 1966, as much a community resource as opportunity for free education. Two years later the Anti-University opened in Shoreditch, London, the same year as the Hornsey and Guildford art school strikes, to immediately contested discussions about its direction and the respective statuses of student and teacher: “Perhaps these developments cannot come about without real qualitative changes: an end to the distinctions between ‘student’, ‘teacher’, ‘administration’, and all that implies socially and financially.”<sup>51</sup>

### **All the bright neuroses—women’s writing in the 60s**

In the discussions around experimental music, art, poetry, and performance in the 60s and early 70s, it is conspicuous how little space there seems to have been for women or people of color to participate, nor to see their contributions accounted for in subsequent histories. This exclusion was evident in the lineup for the 1965 International Poetry Incarnation at the Albert Hall. The most significant public poetry event of the decade attended by around 7,000 people involved more than 20 speakers, none of whom were women. Invariably sidelined from any central role in these activities, women and artists of color instead brought into prominence fields like feminist theory, cultural studies, or dub reggae from which the genealogies and prejudicial classifications of the dominant counterculture were sometimes be highlighted and rewritten. As indicated earlier, in that

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<sup>51</sup> *You And The Anti-U*, flyer for Anti-University meeting, 1968, reproduced in Andrew Wilson, “Spontaneous Underground: An Introduction to London Psychedelic Scenes, 1965-1968,” *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2005, p75.

milieu the term “outsider” only extended as far as masculine ludic improvisation allowed, to performers like Nuttall, Lacey and Milligan.

In 1969 Michael Horowitz published the anthology *Children of Albion: Poetry of the ‘Underground’ in Britain*, its touchstones being the recent bicentenary of William Blake’s birth, Allen Ginsberg’s invocation “Albion Albion your children dance again” in his poem “Liverpool Muse,” and a wholesale rejection of the “two-dimensional concept-cage” of Movement poets’ hegemony that Horowitz claimed led to “budding talents being buried alive.”<sup>52</sup>

One of the handful of women poets included in *Children of Albion*,<sup>53</sup> Tina Morris was deeply committed to alternative avenues for publishing poetry. Working out of Blackburn with her poet

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<sup>52</sup> Horowitz, *Children of Albion, Afterwords*, p316.

<sup>53</sup> Looking back, the eclipse of women poets and artists in this period now seems brutally shameful. Why wasn’t more work being done at the time to argue their case and develop the necessary archives as the work was being made? Geraldine Monk has some interesting thoughts on these omissions which points to the relative success of someone like Tina Morris: “Secondly, we come to the inevitable question of where all the women were. Their absence from poetry events in the 1960s and ’70s seems shocking now [...]. Gender roles were still very much prescribed and segregation of the sexes much more pronounced. Men didn’t push prams and women weren’t supposed to smoke in the streets. So it wasn’t just women who had to find their voices: men also had to find theirs. Reading and writing poetry certainly wasn’t expected of ‘real’ men. However, because of social constraints and stunted attitudes, it was always going to be immensely more difficult for women. The way forward was not just to write poetry but to

husband Dave Cunliffe, Morris ran BB Books and published the magazine *Poetmeat* that featured British writers like Bob Cobbing and Brian Patten as well as significant international figures like Tuli Kupferberg and Octavio Paz. Morris volunteered for CND and was an early activist for animal rights. When Cunliffe was charged with obscenity for publishing *The Golden Convolvulus*,<sup>54</sup> with its erotic illustrations by Arthur Moyses, she was fired from her library job as a consequence. “The mad musicman,” one of four Morris pieces featured in Horowitz’s collection, proposed intimacy and affection as antidotes to the institutional insanity diagnosed in *Bomb Culture*.

The mad musicman  
is hammering again  
at the window of our world  
his eyes wild peering  
thru wind/rain/frenzy  
thru/into the peaceful  
green of our spring.  
Out there all is madness  
& terror & strange beasts  
lurk in shadow. & the sun

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start running presses, become editors and run poetry events [...]” Geraldine Monk, “Preface,” *Cusp: Recollections of Poetry in Transition*, Shearsman Books: Bristol, 2012, p13.

<sup>54</sup> In an undated one-page catalogue for BB Books Cunliffe and Morris describe *The Golden Convolvulus* as a “Sociological & literary collage of contemporary sexual attitudes. Pronounced ‘indecent’ by a Blackburn jury & thus not available by mail.”



wears a hangman's noose.  
& fingers are severed from all hands  
& no dreams anywhere.  
His thin rattling fingers  
tapping with wind/hail  
against glass.  
we lie close/cool in day's twilight  
& allow the outside world  
to become but a memory  
in our arms<sup>55</sup>

Given this marginalization of their work, it is not surprising that mental health issues preoccupied and beset women writers. The decade is framed by two such poets in whose work we can glimpse an alternative texture to the intoxicating chaos of the 60s. Both Sylvia Plath and Veronica Forrest-Thomson wrote of their experiences of mental illness, both ending their lives through suicide or careless overdose as if finally tired of always being kept on the outside margins.

Many pills, Matilda, does that make tonight?  
But you *must* tell if you take the yellows.  
The eyeball, listless under its tiny lid,  
[...]

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<sup>55</sup> Horowitz, *Children of Albion*, p253.

the grass is also green, so slowly the eyeball  
did turn bloodshot in its emptying socket.<sup>56</sup>

There is sense here that Laing's focus on listening to illness may have always been insufficient to have compensated women artists and writers from the impact of creative isolation and institutional neglect.

All the bright neuroses  
Sparkle as they go  
Depression and obsession  
Back and forth they flow.<sup>57</sup>

Sylvia Plath's radio play "Three Women," (subtitled "A Poem for Three Voices / Setting: A Maternity Ward and round about") was broadcast twice on the BBC Third Programme, in August and September 1962. In the way that it unfolds three women's hospital experiences of childbirth, miscarriage, and adoption, and permits no male perspective, this is an unflinching examination of extremes of female emotion. Plath wields a sharpened lapidary language in this early feminist play that anticipates women's anger and frustration of being shouldered aside by masculine intensity of experience and immediacy prioritized by the 60s counterculture. Such biases are exposed by Plath's distrust for *that* world and by her distaste for the kind of literal, instrumental poetry that, step-by-step, ties imagery to experience. In "Three Women" there is the bleakest vision glimpsed in a swan's eye by the "third voice" of the mother giving up her child for adoption:

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<sup>56</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, "The Aquarium" from *On the Periphery*, in *Collected Poems and Translations*, Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers: London, 1990, p67.

<sup>57</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, "I have a little hourglass," *Collected Poems*, p99.

I saw the world in it—small, mean and black,  
Every little word hooked to every little word, and act to act.<sup>58</sup>

There is also the grim observation of the “second voice,” the woman who has miscarried, emerging from hospital into the streets:

The woman who meets me in windows—she is neat  
/.../  
It is I. It is I—  
Tasting the bitterness between my teeth.  
The incalculable malice of the everyday.<sup>59</sup>

Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s writings on Plath seal the decade with their argument against expressiveness and engagement with everyday life as sufficient criteria for poetic purpose.<sup>60</sup> That

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<sup>58</sup> Sylvia Plath, “Three Women—A Poem for Three Voices,” *Winter Trees*, Faber and Faber Ltd.: London, 1971, p42.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p49.

<sup>60</sup> “Whereas another reviewer might allow for free ‘play of words’ as well as ‘direct personal statement’ within the context of a single poem, Forrest-Thomson is unwilling to accept Plath’s poetry in which she senses overt reliance on the empirical nature of lived experience, because she believes that poetry ought to ‘question the assumptions of its readers and of the world it is presumed to share with them’. If this questioning fails to occur, ‘art’, she argues, ‘will cease to be creative at all’ and ‘[w]e shall be trapped in the world “small, mean and black[”] [...] which is the enemy to imaginative exploration’.” Anna Moser, “‘Linguistically Wounded’: Veronica

everyday life, “the awfulness of the modern world,”<sup>61</sup> that is never full nor explosive enough for the counterculture, serves Forrest-Thomson as the barest scaffold on which to work with language. At the time of her death Forrest-Thomson had left an annotated copy and unpublished review of Plath’s *Winter Trees*. Her book *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* argued for Plath as writing against divulging the personal through an emphasis on poetic device. Tellingly, neither poet is included in Horowitz’s book. Although Forrest-Thomson shared Horowitz’s antipathy towards the Movement poets,<sup>62</sup> this would have been no protection against his dislike for the malingering model of what he called T.S. Eliot’s “dry bones.” For Forrest-Thomson, Eliot and Ezra Pound were amongst the last to really work on enabling words to acquire an independence from what they described, underlying her own commitment to “the importance of non-meaningful levels of language in poetry”<sup>63</sup> and to an alertness against the world’s unwelcome encroachments. What could be more different from the unconditional, and conspicuously male, immersion in life of Nuttall’s or Horowitz’s acclamations of transformative poetic rebellion by “these young men of

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Forrest-Thomson, Sylvia Plath, and the Limits of *Poetic Artifice*,” *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 10(1): 9, 2018, p9.

<sup>61</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, “Preface: On the Periphery,” *Collected Poems*, p263.

<sup>62</sup> “It was this which first aroused her interest in concrete poetry as an antidote to the formlessness and academicism of the Movement writers and the introversion of the so-called ‘confessional’ poets,” from “An Impersonal Statement” read by Forrest-Thomson at Bristol Arts Centre, 1967. Forrest-Thomson, *Collected Poems*, p260.

<sup>63</sup> Written as introduction to a reading of the poem “Richard II” in Southwark Cathedral, 1975, an event curtailed by her premature death. Forrest-Thomson, *Collected Poems*, p266.

the new age”<sup>64</sup> than these lines of forceful withdrawal from Forrest-Thomson’s poem “Phrase-Book” published in 1971?

Words are a monstrous excrescence.

Everything green is extended. It  
is apricot, orange, lemon, olive and cherry,  
and other snakes in the linguistic grass;  
also a white touch of marble which evokes  
no ghosts, the taste of squid, the . . .

Go away. I shall call a policeman.

Acrocorinth which evokes no  
goats under the lemon blossom.

World is a monstrous excrescence;  
he is following me everywhere, one  
Nescafé and twenty Athenes, everything  
green; I am not responsible for it.

I don’t want to speak to you.

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<sup>64</sup> Horowitz, *Children of Albion*, p317, “& beheld the unfettere’d insurrection of Ginsberg and Corso through unblinker’d eyes – wild flowers growing straight up – to shame the same different pressed leaves and old mown grassblades ; a green & pleasant land again, suddenly, in sight of these young men of the new age who put poetry before all else.”

Leave me alone. I shall stay here.  
I refuse a green extension. Beware.  
I have paid you. I have paid you  
enough, sea, sun, and octopodi.  
It is raining cats and allomorphs.  
“Where” is the British Embassy.<sup>65</sup>

For Anna Moser, this apparent formalism, that abstractly coils around a minimal scaffold of everyday life, might in the end share with Plath “an anti-confessional emotionality.”<sup>66</sup> With extreme discipline Forrest-Thomson sculpts words into bas-reliefs of paradoxically pent-up energy. This subversively affective formalism is a radical aesthetic. Plath’s and Forrest-Thomson’s poems share a world-attunement of fascination, discomfort, and fury, where deceptively plain observations are razor-sharpened by unpredictable language inventions. These pass judgement on a decade whose immersion in worldliness withheld purpose from them, and from women’s lives more generally.

Doris Lessing was always acclaimed as a writer, yet her work focused relentlessly on the intertwining of women’s mental health with levels of social and economic responsibility that were disproportionate to their diminished social status. *The Golden Notebook* may be Lessing’s feminist landmark, but, as the last of five novels comprising the aptly named *Children of Violence* series, *The Four-Gated City* is the more striking work for its sweeping account of ideas surging out of the 50s and 60s, its invention of alternative family structures, its radical working through of women’s

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<sup>65</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thomson, ‘Phrase-Book’ from *Language-Games, Collected Poems*, p45.

<sup>66</sup> Moser, op cit., p19.

mental illness (drawing on Laing), and its anticipation of global catastrophe, caused in this fictional account by nuclear war, plague, and experiments at Porton Down.

Contrasting with Nuttall's self-aggrandizement, but sharing the same backdrop of Aldermaston marches and writers' lives, here are extended analyses by the central character Martha of male sexual generosity, erotic demands, and sadistic manipulation as these affect her situation caught up in caring for an extended family that is not her own. The actions of Lessing's character Jack, first sexual enabler and then malevolent pimp, make Nuttall's assertively selfish sexuality (that in his poetry takes its legitimacy from an assumed counter-hegemony) appear fundamentally exploitative: "Once he had been all a subtle physical intelligence. Now he had become stupid. Now his body was entirely a servant to a kind of cunning, which needed to get a woman under its will, in order to degrade her, but degrade her morally."<sup>67</sup> One way that writer Mark Coldridge, for whom Martha works as secretary, grasps the looming nuclear threat is by composing murals in his office of predictive signs of the imminent disaster, an accumulation of evidence of political and infrastructural madness. This is a form of psychic world-attunement, of listening to the cacophony of the present:

...this wall represented factor X; that absolutely obvious, out-in-the-open, there-for-anybody-to-see fact which nobody was seeing yet, the same whether it was a question of a rocket failing to get itself off a launching pad, or the breakdown of an electric iron the first time it is used, or a block of flats or cooling towers collapsing.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Doris Lessing, *The Four-Gated City*, Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1969, p386.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p414.

Martha's identification with Coldridge's schizophrenic wife Lynda is a reimagining of Laingian treatment: "Yet in their own inner experience this was a time of possibility [...] They called it 'working.' [...] out of all this material gathered, they began to get glimpses of a new sort of understanding."<sup>69</sup> Martha's willed self-exposure to madness resembles, and is mistaken for, a challenging LSD trip. At the core is "a great chaos of sound"<sup>70</sup> that vibrates her body towards a kind of shattering. At the end of this psychic turning inside out, Martha delivers her verdict to the mental health industry:

I've seen the underside of myself. Which isn't me—any more than my surface is me. I am the watcher, the listener...

FINALLY: THE CENTRAL FACT. IF AT ANY TIME AT ALL I HAD GONE TO A DOCTOR OR TO A PSYCHIATRIST, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THAT. I'M OVER THE EDGE. BUT EVEN IF I STAY HERE I CAN MANAGE (LIKE LYNDA)<sup>71</sup>

Much of American writer Kate Millett's disarmingly honest autobiographical work *Flying* takes place at the turn of the decade in London where she finishes editing her 1971 film *Three Lives*. Like Lessing's Martha, Millett is also sacrificing time to make someone else's family life manageable. In ways that couldn't be more different from the selfish intensity of the interactions in *Bomb Culture*, Millett's London narrative that analyses her close relationships, encounters with revolutionary politics, debates on sexuality, and struggles in editing suites and screening rooms, centers on the care of Winnie, her friends' severely neurologically impaired four-year old, for

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, pp356-7.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p473.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p524.



whom she organizes a large team of volunteer helpers from the Gay Liberation Front, with all the challenges of convening a scratch orchestra of non-musicians. One key moment occurs when Winnie's parents and Millett recognize that all the effort at care is ultimately to give the boy a chance at a fuller, autonomous life, "Emerging into humanity as a child with a child's full human claim."<sup>72</sup> Millett's advocacy of non-violence runs counter to the enthusiasms of the time, her point being that what is paramount is improvement in human relations, in love, childcare, free speech, everything that gets swept aside by militancy. In the staccato, note-taking style of book, she calls this humbler process of amelioration "...fluid...of the spirit, an attitude. It insinuates. It is oblique."<sup>73</sup> Millett is invited for lunch by Doris Lessing where they share anxieties about writers' agency with each highlighting the specific impact of the other's work—*The Golden Notebook* versus *Sexual Politics*. For Lessing, Millett's book has initiated an international force for change by starting from home within women's immediate social environment. Millett's summary of this epiphanic encounter provides the modest philosophy underlying her radical work: "And change is a spiritual discipline one practices, waiting in hope. Starting with you and those around you. Knowing it takes time and that change is deep, is living, is a force formed within. Then projected, supported by others, feeling it too. A communion."<sup>74</sup>

Given Millett's idea of revolution as "a deep emotional type of transformation that must also take place inside us...[as]...a better way to live,"<sup>75</sup> how does this compare with the work of male

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<sup>72</sup> Kate Millett, *Flying*, Touchstone: New York, 1974, p332.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p331.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p360.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p330.

artists and writers whose more violent actions on material claim to be symptomatic of what has to be changed? In a careful reading of the life program emerging from the engagement of Lessing's fiction with Laing's clinical work, Marion Vlastos is able to position her evaluation in relation to the chaos of the 60s to suggest that the Lessing-Millett revolution as a process of growth, as fluidity, would be irreconcilable with any radical aesthetics of trauma:

Neither Lessing nor Laing is optimistic about the possibility of radically changing the society, but both are convinced that the only hope for securing our future lies in the individual's journey 'back and in' [quoting Laing's *Politics of Experience*]. Clearly, the trip that involves complete loss of the ego—an ideal of the hip culture of the sixties—will solve no problems; if the individual is to emerge from his experience able to communicate or embody what he has learned, the unique self must not be submerged.<sup>76</sup>

Lessing's perspective on the dangerous masculine alignment of chaotic exacerbation with actual madness is clear in her evocation of the schizoid individual's cacophonous reality: "It was as if a million radio sets ran simultaneously, and her mind plugged itself in fast to one after another, so that words, phrases, songs, sounds, came into audition and then faded."<sup>77</sup> This is a state not to be celebrated but from which to escape.

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<sup>76</sup> Marion Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy," p257, *Modern Language Association*, PMLA, Vol. 91, No. 2 (March 1976), pp245-258.

<sup>77</sup> Lessing, *The Four-Gated City*, p473.

## Schizoid Caribbean artists

Focused on critically reexamining histories of colonization and postcolonial legacies, it seems that Caribbean activism would be the quintessential counterculture. The decades-long West Indian experience of opposing white institutions might have encouraged British countercultural activists to turn first to Black writers for tactics of cultural militancy, but instead this was usually a last recourse. For their part, turning inward and away from contemporaneous radical events in Britain was necessary for Caribbean writers in the struggle to resolve conflicting experiences of working under different living conditions in the West Indies and in Britain, suffering a lack of significant audience interest in the UK, and dealing with the challenge of engaging with the growing political radicalism of Black Power without conceding all creative autonomy. Caribbean residents in Britain realized that all their energy had to be directed towards working on wresting and reinventing language and image from out of their complicated historical determinations so that artists of color might be more effectively armed against racism and cultural marginalization. Black writers were already disengaged and distrustful of a British society largely indifferent towards them, and they were alienated by the English language as an initially imposed colonial requirement and then a postcolonial expectation. There are few reviews of their work, if they can publish at all. They are *de facto* a kind of counterculture, but one whose oppositional qualities can too easily be dismissed as the concerns of immigrants, as Black issues, as matters just for Caribbean society and culture, or perhaps most damagingly as the complaint of those whose wish to be included in the mainstream invalidates their potential as an alternative critical culture.

White counterculture antagonisms were neither driven by race nor the demands and legacies of subaltern nations. Alternative modes of living were chosen by whites and not forced on them. Their deprivation and alienation was a less visible condition. Markers of poverty and alienation

were degrees of whiteness rather than the result of a blanket rejection based on color and nationality. A lack of empathy for the economic and social setbacks experienced by Black British citizens, and misrepresentations like that of Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, cast the counterculture as a temporary recreation for white adolescents with the financial security of their middle class families as a safety net.

The record of inclusion of Black spokespeople in counterculture events and publications was negligible and so speakers turned towards their own constituencies for peer support and creative purpose. None participated in the 1965 International Poetry Incarnation and only one Black poet, Michael X, was featured in Horowitz's 1969 collection, and then by only a single poem.<sup>78</sup> At the Dialectics of Liberation Conference at the Roundhouse in July 1967, a second mass-audience countercultural event with no women speakers, the only participants representing Black British and American communities were C.L.R. James and Stokely Carmichael. Where were artists and writers to turn but to the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), out of which grew New Beacon Books and Savacou Press?

Inaugurated in London in 1966, CAM was founded by Kamau (then Edward) Brathwaite, John La Rose and Andrew Salkey to involve writers and artists whose creative lives were often split between the West Indies and England. The BBC World Service Caribbean Voices program had ended eight years earlier and CAM sought to draw together the community of diasporic artists

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<sup>78</sup> As noted by Sarah J. Lawson Welsh (Black British Poetry, *The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry 1945-2010*, Cambridge University Press, 2015), this exclusion of Black poets from mainstream anthologies doesn't begin to be corrected until the 1980s. Even the 1982 *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* includes no Black poets.

and writers, including James and Stuart Hall, for critical discussion and promotion of their work. It is telling that there seems to be virtually no intersection of Horowitz's and Nuttall's networks and that of CAM in spite of the contemporaneous publication by Oxford University Press of Brathwaite's significant early collections of poetry; *Rights of Passage* in 1967, *Masks* in 1968, and *Islands* in 1969.<sup>79</sup> The complex layering of the Caribbean writer's rebelliousness, committed to developing an island identity in opposition to legacies of colonialism, and engaged with Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney's political activism, would have felt alien, even incomprehensible, to many white British writers in the 1960s. Writing in the September 1970 *Savacou*, Marina Maxwell's classification of these artists as "cultural guerillas" doesn't sound so far from Nuttall's "Underground"<sup>80</sup> when she invokes a "political art, political theatre, political poetry, political literature" where "we must be involved in the psychological struggle which underpins our political

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<sup>79</sup> Originally from Barbados, Brathwaite had spent a decade teaching in Ghana after graduating from Cambridge University in the early 1950s. Given Brathwaite's time in Ghana, and the embedding of African language, imagery, drum rhythms, and history in those early books, it is regrettable that he would be overlooked by a poetry movement identifying its roots in jazz and its African origins—"Sing Halleluia the new apocalypse of troubadors – jointing the bonds of Reader & Congregation and the classic Afric jazz pattern of call & response – individual and collective swinging together in harmony." Horowitz, *Children of Albion*, p335.

<sup>80</sup> Nuttall's "Underground," like Horowitz's use of the term, broadly refers to the white British producers of the counterculture, including poets, performers, musicians, artists, and alternative press.

struggle.”<sup>81</sup> But Maxwell emphatically takes this struggle back to the roots culture from where the artists originate: “We have only to look around us and listen; on the campus, the Black is Beautiful cry is only a beginning. [...] Much more important we only have to listen across the Caribbean, on the streets, in the Sound System yards, in the calypso tents, in the rejection statements of the Rastafari—and we know that we are in the presence of our own gods. [...] We, the schizoid artists, torn between our education and our instinct stand outside the *hounfor* as the ceremony continues despite us.”<sup>82</sup>

The increasing influence of Black Power on younger participants of CAM, agitating for direct engagement of writing practices with the radicalization of Caribbean diasporic communities, caused a rift with those members focused on the challenges of working for multiple audiences, white and black, and both in Britain and at home. At the same time, many in CAM recognized the urgent relevance of Carmichael’s *Dialectics of Liberation* talk with its analysis of institutional racism and its uncompromising resolution of the schizophrenic colonial relation identified by Maxwell.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Marina Maxwell, “Towards a Revolution in the Arts,” *Savacou No. 2*. September 1970, p26.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p20-21.

<sup>83</sup> John La Rose noted at the time “Almost in the last year, and one observes, for example, that you’ve got the kind of relationship both with the West Indian going back to his language. In terms of clarification, I feel that the effect of Stokely Carmichael’s presence in August last year was a catalyst in a way that nothing before has been a catalyst. And you can see within that one year’s experience a fantastic development has occurred.” Anne Walmsley, “Second CAM Conference – University of

I have something to say against England, I really do, because when I was young I had to read all that rot about how good England was to Trinidad, while she was raping us left and right. And all I used to read about when I was small was London, the beauty of London and how peacefully everybody lived, and how nice life was—at my expense. And I used to say, “I sure would like to get to London and burn it down to the ground.”<sup>84</sup>

In that talk Carmichael quoted Fanon’s discussion “Let us decide not to imitate Europe...” from *The Wretched of the Earth* on the failures of the once-colonized USA to avoid mimicking and compounding the genocidal cruelties of its former colonizers. While working on *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon was a psychiatrist in a Tunis hospital which cared for French soldiers whose mental health was impaired by their roles as state torturers, as well as non-combatant Algerians and Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) insurgents who had survived torture during interrogation. In the closing section “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” Fanon analyses the pathologies that, under colonialism, caused Algerians to fill the mental hospitals long before the uprising began. He attributes these pathologies to the denial of personhood forced on the colonized by the French to the point where those oppressed no longer have any sense of self.<sup>85</sup> Rather than those inherent propensities of the Algerian mind towards violence and laziness that colonial psychiatrists had

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Kent” (conference transcript), George Padmore Institute (London), CAM, February 4, 2002. John La Rose, pp36-37 .

<sup>84</sup> Stokely Carmichael, “The Dialectics of Liberation,” *Stokely Speaks: from Black Power to Pan-Africanism*, Lawrence Hil Books: Chicago 2007, p85.

<sup>85</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press: New York, 1963, p250.

always ascribed to them, it was colonialism that created widespread psychological instabilities and inertia, whether involuntary or the intentional avoidance of work as a resistance to occupation.<sup>86</sup>

It is clear how Fanon's work would be valued by Black Power activists, but what is striking in this context is the conjoining of psychic and physiological reactions as psychosomatic pathologies. Amongst the former are extreme anxiety, indifference, inhibition, compulsive verbal repetition, and fear, while amongst the latter are severe muscular contractions, stomach ulcers, menstruation problems, motor instabilities, and accelerated cardiac rhythms.

It seems to us that in the cases here chosen the events giving rise to the disorder are chiefly the bloodthirsty and pitiless atmosphere, the generalization of inhuman practices, and the firm impression that people have of being caught up in a veritable Apocalypse.<sup>87</sup>

Although there is not that degree of persecution, the significance for Caribbean writers would be recognizing the reoccurrence of such symptoms in their communities in Britain as they continue to experience the kinds of racist depersonalization Fanon describes, even after their home nations in the West Indies had achieved independence.

With a few alterations, Laing's outline of normality and schizophrenia might have been drawn from the post-colonial condition of self-alienation within the racist political structure

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<sup>86</sup> "The native's laziness is the conscious sabotage of the colonial machine; on the biological plane it is a remarkable system of auto-protection; and in any case it is a sure brake upon the seizure of the whole country by the occupying power." *ibid.*, p294.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p251.



defined by Fanon,<sup>88</sup> or much earlier from the conflicted experience of African Americans identified by W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness."<sup>89</sup> While madness as a trope in the formulations of 60s oppositional culture fuels Nuttall's "Sick" chapter in *Bomb Culture*, this Caribbean schizophrenia testifies to the alienation of artists made insecure by colonizing culture and value systems while trapped within the metropolitan language of an imposed English education. During the early period of 1967 the issues preoccupying CAM concerned the divided consciousness and loyalties of writers and artists who felt quite rootless in England but also disconnected, temporarily or for a prolonged time, from the Caribbean. There was a focus on how these twinned alienations could be alleviated and an attempt to define the audiences that need addressing. The question in Britain of whom to address was already conflicted amongst these writers and during the late 60s that debate shifted towards West Indian readers in terms of identity and subject material. What to write about and in what language? In this predicament only patois,

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<sup>88</sup> "What we are striving for is to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in a colonial situation," Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (1952), Grove Press: New York, 2008, p14.

<sup>89</sup> "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, — a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (1903), from *Writings*, Literary Classics of the United States: New York, 1986, p364.

a nation language of the islands, offered the linguistic tools for subversive cultural initiatives. In CAM meetings and publications the valuing of calypso by participants like Brathwaite and Gordon Rohlehr for its patois language and celebration of stories of everyday life, and the continuous parallel discussion of indigenous folk qualities, showed the negotiation of a new aesthetic that had parallels in the UK and US counterculture's uses of modified language and alternative subjects, but which was sharply focused on linguistic and narrative inventions in Trinidad, Guyana, and Jamaica.

CAM's debates achieved some consensus as to the method of healing, or correcting of this alienation which was caused as much by class and race divisions fixed by language and color in the Caribbean as the ones in Britain that they duplicated. Out of the first CAM conference in September 1967 came the understanding that a latent cultural wealth existed within folk culture and language, what in western academic discourse would be called popular culture. This hidden, underappreciated culture of creole Black West Indians had to be uncovered and celebrated. At the same time, the way that Black writers and artists who had been working with inherited European genres and English language would succeed in liberating their own minds would be by developing new aesthetic models based on these folk traditions. The first trigger for this shift came from Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia's talk at that conference of which Andrew Salkey wrote "She talked about the desired and desirable Cultural Resistance, the socio-cultural revolution and the necessary attention to be paid to folk wisdom, the people's cultural needs, and the artist's responsibility."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Anne Walmsely, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History*, New Beacon Books: London and Port of Spain, 1992, p99.

Once again we may discern the legacy of Fanon in the recognition of the healing value of such cultural uncoverings by Caribbean writers:

The customs, traditions, beliefs, formerly denied and passed over in silence are violently valorized and affirmed ... The sense of the past is rediscovered, the worship of ancestors resumed ... Reclaiming the past does not only rehabilitate or justify the promise of a national culture. It triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized's psycho-affective equilibrium.<sup>91</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The redirection of consciousness away from its capture by mainstream culture, psychiatrists, capitalists, and colonizers so that it could progress towards health enabled a productive agency in controlling one's destiny and environment. In these respects the objectives of Caribbean nation historians and writers did align with those of American Black Power activists.

To become conscious of one's blackness was a healthy psychosocial development. It was to make a positive statement about one's worth as a person. [...] After declaring themselves worthy of critiquing white values, champions of black consciousness were expected to work toward a reorientation of black life. Their mandate was to create new symbols and

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<sup>91</sup> Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," quoted in Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce, *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd.: London, 2017, p188.

assumptions which would guide future generations. These were to be drawn largely from the black experience.<sup>92</sup>

Nuttall's address to the threat of the bomb was to engage in exacerbative creative mayhem only to eventually conclude that such protests dislodged none of their targets. By contrast, like Black activists' work on culture and language, Lessing and Millett navigated the depredations, trauma, and fear through steadily working on relationships, through caring. It is possible that these orientations towards order at the start of the 70s only seem conservative when compared with a cultural avant-gardism that privileges masculine pleasure and self-interest.

Notwithstanding its contradictions of organized incapacity, it was suggested earlier that the Portsmouth Sinfonia may have embodied a return to order after the open parameters of the 1960s. The Sinfonia emerged as an asymptomatic alternative to the effortful protests of the previous decade where its unproficient performances were first conceptual and secondarily comedic. Staging ineptitude effectively circumvented the self-assured performances of a few years earlier that claimed untamed, unplanned and often intoxicated choreography as their own justification. By 1968 there were signs of impatience from some for a more reflective kind of culture. These included Nuttall, who was looking for greater critical self-evaluation, while deferring to his artist colleagues for help in preserving the energy and untaught tactics of immediacy and invention that generated such promise in the first place.

“Meanwhile it behoves the artists, the laboratory men, to turn away from the Nothingness.

[...] It is time they turned back to the engagement, to stress and struggle, will and ego. It

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<sup>92</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1992, p51-2.

is time to apply their supremely informed sensibilities to action, decisive constructive action that leaves behind it a concrete achievement as testimony to its worth.”<sup>93</sup>

At the close of his essay on late-60s psychedelic culture, Wilson notes a shift in mood regarding the need for something to endure from all the experimentation. In March 1968 Richard Neville wonders what the subcultures can produce that will survive, while Barry Miles asks if Mick Jagger agrees that a sober evaluation of all the alternative pursuits of the previous decade would be timely.<sup>94</sup>

Given that this is an essay about alternative ways of rethinking the extent of the counterculture, it seems appropriate to close with a poet not included in any of the major radical events or publications marking the achievements of cultural rebellion at the time. For the Caribbean scholar heading to England in the 50s and 60s education was considered an extraordinary opportunity and testament of public recognition by the colonizing country. By contrast, on arrival a racist social and cultural reality impeded the newcomers’ participation and undermined their identity. Alternative institutions, art school strikes, and efforts at unlearning or deskilling will have seemed an unaffordable and privileged indulgence to most West Indians, shut out from participation in such social milieus, as Maxwell explained “torn between our education and our instinct.” Included in *Rites of Passage*, here are short verses from two Brathwaite poems that present symptom and cure for 60s racism and alienation.

And what of John with the European name  
who went to school and dreamt of fame

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<sup>93</sup> Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, p253.

<sup>94</sup> Wilson, “Spontaneous Underground,” p89.

his boss one day called him a fool  
and the boss hadn't even been to school<sup>95</sup>

To hell  
with Af-  
rica  
to hell  
with Eu-  
rope too,  
just call my blue  
back bloody spade  
a spade and kiss  
my ass. O-  
kay? So  
let's begin.<sup>96</sup>

How might future histories identify where cultural paths intersect that now only seem divergent? Closer comparison of the criss-crossing narratives of mental illness and their healing as they take place in different communities under varying kinds of pressure may be one such method. Once the stories and contributions of those typically excluded from analyses of countercultural experiments are accounted for may we gain a fuller understanding of that complicated period.

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<sup>95</sup> Edward Brathwaite, "Calypso," *Rites of Passage*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1967, p48

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p28.