

Profile

Kylie Minogue

The birth was in Bethlehem. The date was 28 May, 1968. There was a time when a birth in Bethlehem was considered newsworthy, but times have changed. The unique place and event have become cliched, history repeating itself first as farce, but then interminably diffused and deferred as soap opera. So Bethlehem becomes Bethlehem Hospital, Melbourne and the star in the East becomes Kylie Minogue.

May 1968 was a newsworthy month. The society of the spectacle was proclaimed by the situationists. Students and car workers mobilised on the streets of Paris, daubing slogans on the walls of the establishment: "*Sous le pave, la plage!*" — Under the pavement, the beach!

Down Under the pavements of Paris, if you dig far enough, there are indeed beaches — the antipodean beaches of Australia. A perfect location for the society of the spectacle, the politics of the body.

The revolutionaries of the 'sixties welcomed May '68 as a world-historical event, comparable in significance with the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.

But just as the French Revolution ended in Napoleon's empire and then farcical repetition under Napoleon III, so the *evenements* of '68 were compromised. Culture and politics, fused into one critical mass during '68, were defused. The *politics of ecstasy* and *bomb culture* parted company. Dropouts became cultural entrepreneurs and political activists became professors of sociology.

Left to themselves, the people could think of nothing better to do politically than elect Richard Nixon, General de Gaulle and Ted Heath. In Australia they couldn't remember whom they'd elected, as a succession of conservative prime ministers came and went, one of them going from the beach in symbolic fusion of politics and surfing, never to be seen again.

Left to itself, the people's culture maintained a lively interest in the body and spectacle, but not in politics and society. And Kylie Minogue, a child of '68, grew.

Did she revere Abbie Hoffman, Rudi Dutschke, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Richard Neville, Germaine Greer?

No, but she and her Melburnian schoolchums loved Abba, and her little life was changed when mum (Welsh ex-ballerina Carol) took her to see Olivia Newton-John in *Grease*.

This was the spectacle of the body that mobilised little Kylie: high energy wholesomeness, disco dancing, toothsome Australiana at large. She went on to score the part of Carla in *The Sullivans* at the age of eleven, followed by that of Charlotte in *The Henderson Kids*. Finally, she pupated, or pubertied, into Charlene in *Neighbours*.

Waiting only long enough to secure that passport to international *ahdom*, a screen wedding, Kylie rips off her little pink cardi, piles her hair up through the brim of what might be the disco version of the Australian slouch hat, and appears winking winsomely in a little black dress to rip off 'sixties star Little Eva in *The Locomotion*.

The child of '68 has come of age, and with the help of benevolent Uncle Rupert and his friends she's become the sign of '68. The global villagers are all *Neighbours* now, as the culture industry's integrated circuits reproduce Kylie on screen, in music, in magazines and on the lips of the whole world's pre-teens in the sacred time between school and tea.

But already Kylie has been out-Kylied by *The Comedy Company's* Kylie Mole; a reproduction more original than the original, the revenge of the simulacrum.

Maryanne Fahey's roolly excellent Kylie Mole is the role model for Minogue, who now guests on *The Comedy Company* as Mole's friend Rebecca while Mole appears as herself on *Perfect Match*. And the role model for grade six primary school children isn't Minogue but Mole:

Teacher Colin Fletcher said: *I think the reason the show took off so well was because we have a Kylie, Amanda and Dino in the class. I use the show in formal teaching because the kids are so tuned in. I think the kids can relate to Kylie Mole because she is such a real character.* (Perth *Sunday Times*, 18.9.88.)

And the generation of '68 looks on, aghast, muttering *mea culpa*. Is this the reality they imagined, the society of the spectacle, the politics of the body?

Well, no, it isn't. "The Body" is another young Australian person who's electrifying the global image circuits just now. Her name is Elle Macpherson. *Cleo* readers voted Elle the No. 1 woman they would like to look like. She also has the No. 1 lifestyle, she's the No. 3 most glamorous woman in the world after Princess Diana and Joan Collins, and she's the No. 2 ultimate role model for women today after Jana Wendt. (*Cleo*, October 1988.)

And what about Kylie Minogue? She came top in one category. She's the No. 1 worst role model for women. Says *Cleo*: "Most respondents said they wanted to be smart rather than hanker after good looks."

Be smart. Remember what Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* about Kylie Minogue and the turntable revolutions of *The Locomotion*: "An entire people, which had imagined that by means of a revolution it had imparted to itself an accelerated power of motion, suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch and ... the nation feels like a mad Englishman in Bedlam ..."

And so we're back to the defunct epoch of Stars in the East, for as everyone knows, "Bedlam" is a shortened form of Bethlehem Hospital.

John Hartley