Swinging City

A Cultural Geography
of London 1950-1974

Simon Rycroft

SWINGING CITY

Re-materialising Cultural Geography

Dr Mark Boyle, Department of Geography, University of Strathclyde, UK,
Professor Donald Mitchell, Maxwell School, Syracuse University, USA and
Dr David Pinder, Queen Mary University of London, UK

Nearly 25 years have elapsed since Peter Jackson's seminal call to integrate cultural geography back into the heart of social geography. During this time, a wealth of research has been published which has improved our understanding of how culture both plays a part in, and in turn, is shaped by social relations based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, age, sexuality and so on. In spite of the achievements of this mountain of scholarship, the task of grounding culture in its proper social contexts remains in its infancy. This series therefore seeks to promote the continued significance of exploring the dialectical relations which exist between culture, social relations and space and place. Its overall aim is to make a contribution to the consolidation, development and promotion of the ongoing project of re-materialising cultural geography.

Also in the series

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SIMON RYCROFT
Simon Rycroft, University of Sussex, UK

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Preface

Like all books this one is the product of a series of collaborations over a number of years. Initially my research into the 1960s was brilliantly guided by Steve Daniels at Nottingham University. It was then significantly altered as a result of working with the late and much missed Denis Cosgrove at Loughborough and Royal Holloway. Finally, in my current department at the University of Sussex over the years colleagues have, often unwittingly, helped me formulate my ideas. In the latter group I have especially to acknowledge Alan Lester and Brian Short. Passing through each of these sites and some others there are many people who have helped along the way to whom I am grateful: Rob Bartram, Pete Bishop, Anastasia Christou, Maria da Costa, Evelyn Dodds, Felix Driver, Mick Dunford, Adrian Favell, Tony Fielding, Zena Forster, Matthew Gandy, David Gilbert, Pyrs Gruffudd, Mike Heffernan, Richard Hornsey, Steve Jones, Phil Kinsman, Ulrich Lohm, Dave Matless, Jon May, Mandy Morris, Catherine Nash, Ken Olwig, Charles Pattie, George Revill, Ben Rogaly, Barbara Roscoe, James Ryan, Cathérine Senger, Suzanne Seymour, Stefano Soriani, Franceso Vallerani, Katie Walsh and Charles Watkins.

There are also audiences to thank at the Tate and at the Victoria and Albert Museum who helped me formulate a broader overview on London in the 1960s, and of course the students here at Sussex who always challenged my thinking and provided interesting perspectives.

Ideas that have become integral to the book were worked up for various articles in the past few years and I am grateful to all of the editors and anonymous referees who influenced my approach for pieces in *Society and Space*, the *Journal of Historical Geography*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Cultural Geographies* and *Social and Cultural Geography*. Some of the material in the book recasts arguments that I developed in these pieces.

I am sincerely grateful to the team at Ashgate, especially to Val Rose and Carolyn Court who have been remarkably patient with me throughout the process. The practical assistance of staff at the UCL Little Magazines Collection, the UCLA Research Library and the University of Sussex Special Collections was invaluable and the research would not have been possible without them.

Finally and most importantly, I must thank my family, Amelia, Leon and Stefan. They have sustained me and given me purpose through some very difficult times. I should also apologise for being such a miserable bugger over the latter stages of writing this book, so, sorry!

Simon Rycroft
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For Johannes, Leon and Stefan with love

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Material and Immaterial Geographies of 1960s London

> Seen as everything from the foundation of modern liberty to the primary cause of present chaos, this carefree age – in which nothing was hidden and all caution and modesty were cast to the wind – has become the most obscure period of our century, mythologised into a mirage of contradictions: a disappearing decade. (Macdonald 1995: 1)

> … 'the 60s', as apostrophised here, are not so much a chronological era as a state of mind … The myth endures, whatever its dates, and there is substance to that myth. The phenomenon was not a hiccup in history, nor some quaint sideshow, pragmatically dumped into theme-park oblivion by a harder edged world. (Green 1988: viii)

Remembering the Sixties

Whenever I have presented the work on the 1960s that appears in this book I have sometimes been told 'I was there and it wasn't like that', usually as an opener to an exquisitely detailed and knowledgeable question concerning whether one really should define a particular group as psychedelic or certain practice as countercultural. My responses have alternated between a genuinely inquisitive 'so what was it like then?' to a curmudgeonly and exasperated 'don't privilege experience over intellect', although thankfully rarely in so many words. My inability to formulate a reasonable, considered or indeed diplomatic answer was rooted in an insecurity from which I am sure many historians of the recent past suffer – how one accommodates the memories and lived-through experience of one's audience. So, it needs stating at the outset that I was not there and I did not live through any of the things that I write about here. In fact I was 'there' for the first three years of my life, but my age and location, a suburb of Preston, Lancashire, meant that the moments, spaces and experiences that are the subject of this book were not mine. But this does not make me less qualified to talk about the period, at least in the non-autobiographical mode that I use here.

The considered response to that 'I was there …' question is a combination of both answers I had previously offered. It is best summed up by Steve Daniels in his paper on Strawberry Fields as a particular remembering of the 1960s:

> Everyone can remember the Sixties. In the prevailing culture of memory, in which … personal memories grounded in lived experience are conflated with collective memories retrieved from public media, the Sixties are layered by overlapping modes of recollection, including reminiscence, revival, conservation and commemoration, with pop music in general … shaping the period's reproduction and the places associated with it. (Daniels 2006: 28)

Our experiences of the 1960s are then, a mixture of palpable recollections and mediated images, sounds, smells and emotions. They are re-memberings, literally re-assemblages of sensory memories drawn from everyday experience – everyday experiences which include watching retrospectives, reminiscing with old friends and even listening to an upstart who was never there talking at you about it. Whist biographical oral histories of being there and then are important, they should take their place alongside considered analyses of all of the other forms of memory. Psychologists of memory believe that we do not remember the same thing in the same way each time we recall it. Instead, the memory is brought forth in and shaped by the context of recollection; it serves the purpose of the moment of remembering. This too makes redundant that old axiom 'if you remember the Sixties then you weren't there' – an axiom which, ironically, is generally wrongly attributed to the comedian Robin Williams – because even if one did not ingest mind affecting substances, one's recollections will still never be objectively accurate.

Take my own interest in the 1960s. It arose from being exposed to the memories of others, by watching and reading about the period as an undergraduate during the late 1980s. This was a time of twentieth anniversary rememberings of key moments and happenings. It was also a period that contrasted sharply with the 1960s, one of contracting opportunities for anyone not bent on accumulating wealth and status and one in which pop stars were unlikely to inspire hero worship. The 1960s by contrast were presented in retrospectives as a period of possibilities, where dreams, however ridiculous, could be dreamt and even realised. It also seemed to be the point of origin of so many of the ideas that engaged me at the time, like nuclear disarmament, anti-racism, the questioning of assumed gender roles and so on. I now realise that this fascination was part of the period's 'reproduction' to use Daniels's phrase, that I was remembering the 1960s in the context of my time not to mention my own positionality.

It seems that during most years since the late 1980s some form of reconsideration of the 1960s has occurred, usually when various styles in music, fashion, film and life were consciously aping those of the counterculture. Some identify an essential missing element though, that this was a revival of style, not substance: the 1990s and 2000s were not pregnant with revolutionary potential – 'Tune in, turn on but this time don't drop out' (Garfield 1990: 28). After the ferment of Punk and the late 1970s' rejection of all things 'hippy', this renaissance is perhaps surprising. It has several facets, from the 1990s Rave scene appropriating aspects of New Age culture, to more reflective attempts to explain the happenings of the decade constructed from all those influenced by, but not central to, the movement in the

late 1960s (Sinker 1991: 31, Williams 1990: 18). Sixties icons are now repackaged, promoting everything from high street chain stores and soft drinks to cars and pension plans. John and Yoko's 'bed-in for peace' bed at the Amsterdam Hilton commands a higher rate than others in the establishment. The Hilton has recreated the scene in a kind of pastiche multi-media environment, hanging Lennon and Ono pictures on the wall, providing videos and books from the Beatles era, piping in their music, and incorporating a 20-minute slide show projected through a hole in the wall.

This reconstructed picture is further complicated by a spate of accounts from those involved in the revolutionary movement of the 1960s (for example Hayden 1988, Gitlin 1987, O'Brien 1988). Activists on the fringes of the New Left in America have produced most of these accounts. Members of the British Underground have been slower to write their memoirs (for an exception, see Fountain 1988, Ali 1988, Greer 1988, Neville 1995). Key texts of the 1960s were republished in the late 1980s, presumably by popular demand and in response to a general 'it was 20 years ago today …' sentiment. Indeed, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, there seemed to be a reawakening of interest in all things countercultural with 1960s-inspired bands like the Stone Roses proclaiming the contemporary relevance of books like Richard Neville's *Play Power* (1970).

The late Jerry Rubin, the Yippie radical and central figure in the Chicago conspiracy trial, became what we might presume all 1960s revolutionaries would become, an entrepreneur. Rubin's transformation can be traced in his books. *Do It* (1970) details the tactics of fun revolution whilst *Growing (Up) At Thirty–Seven* (1976) confirms Rubin's membership of the 1970s 'Me Generation'; indulging in Yoga, finding a guru, meditating and generally reappraising his impetuous past. He ended up offering marketing advice to a variety of businesses in New York. Similarly, Tom Hayden Chair of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), also a Chicago 'conspirator', has joined mainstream politics in the Californian senate, although he remains to the left of the Democratic Party. His memoirs, *Reunion* (1988), dedicated to the 'The Sixties Generation', justify this trajectory: The traumatic events of the period, particularly the late 1960s were important to his personal development, learning, in the late 1980s, that changing opinions and remorse over previous activities were not betrayals of ultimate goal of truth, but essential to the 'journey' of life (Hayden 1988: xvii). Even recent and potential presidents of the United States proclaim their membership of the radical generation, even though they remind us that many were only voyeurs, observing, not inhaling.

I am very aware therefore that this can only ever be an account from the early twenty-first century that is affected as much by the original source material as it is by the various recollections and rememberings that currently constitute the 1960s. Nevertheless my greatest enjoyment in conducting this research came from immersing myself in the archives and reading reams of original and microfilm copies of underground publications.

Archiving the 1960s

Very little work has been carried out on the underground press in its own right. Studies of the 1960s use these publications as they do mainstream media sources with little regard for the peculiar dynamics of their oppositional discourse and the very different context from which they sprang (for a rare exception, see Nelson 1989). It was with this gap in mind that I undertook a wide-ranging study of the underground press as they operated in particular places and mediated important events. London was chosen simply because it produced the majority of Britain's underground papers and supported the largest countercultural community there, although it must also be noted that the research on London was complemented and contrasted to material from the West Coast of the United States which does not form part of this book.

Sources for the underground press came from two main archives. Most of the British material was drawn from the Little Magazines Collection at University College, London (UCL). Material on American papers and some British publications came from the Micro Film collection held at the Research Library and the Department of Special Collections at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). In London I had the benefit of handling the artefacts whilst the Department of Special Collections at UCLA holds samples of some of the Los Angeles papers. Although I would not claim reading the texts in their original state provides an authentic experience, it was useful to visualise each publication as a whole, not least because that is how they were consumed at the time.

A wide ranging survey was made of all the publications for both London and, where available, major publications from other cities including Birmingham, Manchester, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Detroit, Ann Arbor and Philadelphia. These other publications provided a useful perspective on the countercultures of other cities. I researched the full run of each journal, copying articles and features of interest, and recording overall impressions of editorial policy and changes in approach throughout the run. Some of the material in the UCL Little Magazines Collection is in poor condition, they were not printed on good quality paper causing some to crumble and making the print illegible on others. Some references to underground press articles appear in the book without page numbers and/or authors. This is often because the publications did not carry page numbers in that particular issue, or that the material in the archive was damaged and the page numbers illegible. Many publications carried articles without a named author and it is often difficult to work out who might have written them. Similarly, the microfilm collection at UCLA was often of poor quality. There is no indication on each reel of film as to when these records were transferred to film, but they are the full archives of the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS), an international organisation based in the United States which carried all the issues of each of its member publications (see Chapter 5).

Imagining 1960s London

There are certain ambiguities in images of London from the latter half of the 1960s. Today, when presented with portraits of the scene in retrospectives, it appears that we are stuck around 1966, the hey-day of Swinging London, albeit a dressed-down version: 'These "Swinging Sixties" are now Sanitised Sixties: the messages of a furious and complex time are now reduced, by politicians and disc-jockeys alike, to simplistic elements worthy of a time of retraction' (Savage 1989: 122). In reality this Modish and modernist image was a fleeting moment of myth-making and fashion design surpassed by the evolution of underground London from 1967 onwards (the two are often conflated). Nevertheless, Swinging London, despite its built-in obsolescence, continued to form a veneer that masked subterranean movements, and still does. Underground London did not form in a vacuum nor simply as an adjunct to Swinging London, but developed from a series of experiments in art and cultural expression as a means of protest that spanned most of the 1950s and the 1960s. Up until the summer of 1967, the pervasiveness of the swinging image was so seductive that these experiments seem to remain underground. After 1967, the underground surfaced, some of its factions beginning to question the more materialistic, consumption oriented notions that had sustained Swinging London. It is the mapping of these different but related discourses and their contexts that concerns this book.

Our imagination of London in the 1960s then oscillates between two extremes: the excess, pomp and comic vacuousness of Swinging London, and the less familiar radical, avant-garde, and experimental cultural politics generated by the city's counterculture throughout the decade. Mostly and more recently the former has been repackaged in popular culture. The ironic Austin Powers version of London in the 1960s bathed in Southern Californian sunlight and surrounded by a Southern Californian landscape has become a cultural touchstone for an imageing of period and place. In the 1990s when we were told that Britain was once again 'swinging' the visual and aural icons of Swinging London were recalled in printed media, television series and musical performance. This revival had global dimensions and, one could argue, significant material outcomes. In early 1997, and associated with a global perception of a re-branded Britain that would usher in the landslide victory of the Labour Party in May of the same year, a number US magazines like *Vanity Fair* carried articles on the emergence of a new London:

> In these confident, patriotic times, London culture has gotten to the point where it's not only addressing peculiarly British subjects, but outright revelling in its Britishness, fetishizing and deconstructing the things that set the UK apart from other countries. (Kamp 1997)

Like the *Time* 1966 feature that is reviewed in Chapter 4, these articles mapped London as a global centre for adventurous developments in cultural production including literature, art and music. Despite the *NME* declaring the new London

scene passé only a year later, there has been a continuous stream of US actors and performers migrating to the city since, attracted by a perceived remapping of London as an avant-garde global capital of pop culture.

Building upon this late 1990s revival were a series of other events that reflected more of the second imagining of 1960s London. The adventurous avant-garde experiments in the visual and performing arts that provided the aesthetic motifs of the swinging sixties have recently returned in a series of retrospective exhibitions. In the summer of 2003 visitors to Tate Britain were once again subjected to the woozy disorientation that one experiences when viewing for an extended time some of Bridget Riley's early monochrome Op Art (Moorhouse 2003). The abstract, geometric patterns that one can see in Riley's work found their way into dress fabrics in the boutiques and bazaars of the West End in the 1960s and she has spent much time since in legal disputes over copyright. No doubt a series of other challenges will ensue from the more recent but short lived revival of the Op style in high fashion.

This major retrospective of Riley's work was followed by smaller exhibitions, such as the celebration of the work of the radical architectural group Archigram at the Design Museum in 2004. Coinciding with the Archigram retrospective was a major exhibition on 1960s art, *Art and the 60s: This was Tomorrow*, again at Tate Britain (Stephens and Stout 2004). *Art and the 60s* was a sampler of 1960s British art showcasing works from a range of artists and genres. Whilst some of the aesthetic styles on display at Tate Britain, like those of Op and Pop, were appropriated into a swinging style, other work was less easily incorporated and could perhaps be more easily connected with the counterculture of the later 1960s.

Sixties London, as we will see, is in fact an amalgam of these two imagings. Swinging London was the product of modernist physical and social reconstruction of the city and a series of experiments in the arts and media. The brash and seemingly materialistic swinging image was short-lived and quickly replaced by countercultural or underground London from the mid-1960s onwards. But these apparently disparate and contradictory projects cohere around a shared imagination that worked with a new understanding of nature that differently positioned humanity and technology and was drawn from contemporaneous aesthetic conventions, cosmology and cultural theory. That shared imagination connects the various empirical studies in this book and, although it punctuates the account of post-war London throughout, it needs a brief introduction here.

Cosmic Connections

Christopher Booker, despite his jaded view of the 'British revolution' in the 1950s and 1960s, remarked on the explosion of colour that accompanied the beginning of the 1960s in *The Neophiliacs* (1969). This infusion of colour was limned in the production of the new Sunday colour supplements, containing features which frequently portrayed the 'New Aristocracy' or 'New Class' in London – a group of

20 or so individuals who appeared to run the scene. The first issue of the *Sunday Times Colour Supplement* published on the 4th February 1962, was devoted to profiles of 'People of the '60s', a James Bond story (providing only implicitly, references to a new sexual morality), and 'A sharp glance at the mood of Britain'. 'All in all, the first edition of the *Sunday Times* supplement was a perfect expression of the "dream image" of the time' (Booker 1970: 50).

Booker was particularly resistant to the infiltration of American culture. Along with Richard Ingrams and Peter Usborne, he co-founded *Private Eye* in October 1961, a magazine which seemed to fit uneasily between the world of the establishment and that of the new class. *Private Eye* was the first journal in Britain to use offset lithography, a printing technique later favoured by the underground press for its speed and cheapness. Significantly, the magazine was initially distributed in South Kensington but later, riding on the satire boom of the early 1960s the circulation rose to over 35,000 copies. *Private Eye*'s venture into the club scene with the Establishment Club in Soho appeared for a moment to facilitate an American interest, showcasing comedians like Lenny Bruce. But this link with the United States was to 'snap as the magazine moved towards Little Englandism or Little Londonism' (Fountain 1988: 9). Whilst an enjoyable account, one should read Booker's story of the time in the light of these prejudices.

In *The Neophiliacs* Booker tracks the social and cultural revolution that engulfed early 1960s London. A series of shattering events marked the first five years of the decade: the Profumo Affair, the Great Train Robbery, the Kennedy assassination, Pop Art, the meteoric rise of the Beatles:

> And then, in the summer of 1965, focused by a series of newspaper and magazine articles, at home and abroad, the whole thing had come out into the open – that in the previous few years, England had been overtaken by nothing less than a social 'revolution'. And that London itself, as the centre of this phenomenon, with its suddenly risen legions of pop singers and pop artists, its fashionable young dress designers and interior decorators and fashion photographers, its discotheques nightly crowded with Beatles and Rolling Stones, its hundreds of casinos, its new National Theatre and its daring young playwrights and daring young film-makers and daring strip-tease clubs, with its skyline dominated by the gaunt outlines of soaring new glass-and-concrete towers – all set against a seemingly timeless background of Rolls-Royces and Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace and the swans on the lake at St. James's Park – had been transformed almost overnight into 'the most swinging city in the world'. (Booker 1970: 16–17)

Late 1950s and early 1960s popular and academic accounts of a suddenly frivolous London present a reinvigorated world city, one that was at the centre of modern urban image-making, nationally and globally, and a city which had witnessed in physical, social and discursive environments, a series of radical changes. Images of post-war London, particularly of the late 1950s and 1960s, can be traced in

redefined modes of expression in art, media, fashion, architecture and literature. For me, at the heart of these re-imaginings lie subtle shifts in the geographies of consciousness; of the individual, of the city, and of national and trans-national geographical imaginations. But the geographical imaginings of interest to this account of 1960s London concern the understandings of nature and cosmology that seem to underpin the activities of a variety of individuals and groups who built the 1960s image of the city.

In short and to over simplify, that understanding of nature was post-Newtonian – much less rigid and mechanistic, and more intuitive in its conception of the cosmos. From the early twentieth century onwards nature was recognised to possess an order almost inconceivably complex and subtle. There was departure from old ideas of matter and form and as we move into the post-war period an increased emphasis on the elemental and primitive, complemented by the adoption of an Einsteinian understanding of nature and the cosmos. This is the nature of the wave-particle duality, the Einsteinian cosmology of matter and energy in flux to which humanity is intricately bound.

This shift was in part brought about by advances in visual technologies – microscopic and macroscopic advances were showing new patterns and relationships in the cosmos. These patterns began to find expression in everyday life through art, prose, architecture, performance and so on. Added to an evolutionary understanding of nature that suggested that humans were symbiotically entwined with natural processes then, was a revolution, suggested by Einstein and others, in the ways in which we understood the very matter of that nature. What was solid could easily become invisible as energy and vice-versa. This was something that, at the time, excited and influenced Op Artists, Pop Artists, cultural and media theorists, performers, filmmakers, architects, planners and the counterculture. Whilst infinitely varied, the project of each of these groups concerned making the invisible visible. Each developed tactics and aesthetics that would capture, visualise or materialise these new and fashionable conceptions of nature and the cosmos – to make them known to human senses.

This might seem far distanced, especially perhaps, from the brash, colourful and hedonistic scene of Swinging London that I am claiming was influenced by these ideas. But it probably seems distanced because we are too familiar with the mediated image and reconstituted memories of the period and place. These mediated images draw upon an already borrowed idea – the fashions and styles of the 1960s. The fashions and styles of 1960s London might be easily ignored as flippant, but these 'parasitical trends often prove to be feeding on more substantial creative energy' (McCormick 1985: 88). It is this theme of a cosmic nature and its relationship to post-war philosophies and practices of technology and humanity that is woven throughout the book. It is the reason why in the next two chapters we find ourselves in the post-war years before the 1960s, in places quite some way away from London, and in activities such as architecture, planning, painting and writing that seem far removed from either radical countercultural activities or more flippant swinging concerns.

In tracing these connections there have been some surprises along the way, not the least of which was that I found myself drawn into covering the more spectacular and hackneyed aspects of countercultural politics, something that initially, I had resolutely refused to do. A cultural politics articulated around a phenomenological understanding of mind-body-earth-cosmos symbiotic interconnections chimes well with our received stereotypical image of the 'hippy'. But what surprised me most was the extent to which theses perspectives were constructed upon technological and scientific discourse and not on more esoteric, quasi-religious belief systems. And it is through these hard-edged discourses that the connections can be made to other contemporaneous practices some way distant from the radical or just plain weird practices of the counterculture.

Sometimes as I have tracked the idea in a variety of forms through a variety of practices it has felt rather like uncovering a conspiracy. Quite appropriate to a decade of conspiracy theories of course, but not a comfortable feeling mostly because I was unsure that I was not simply becoming too immersed in the period to take the more objective viewpoints offered by theorists of youth revolt and resistance. But those systematic viewpoints on culture as a process to which practices of resistance are central which formed a key foundation for new cultural geography in the 1980s, also emerged in the 1960s. In fact, one can find them on the pages of the underground press and in the words of various countercultural patriarchs and not just in the publications of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).

Theorising the Counterculture

The non-stylistic dimensions of the counterculture have been consistently ignored in a mass of sociological literature perhaps because they seem to speak the same language. Many analyses of the counterculture, particularly those of the 1970s from groups who could trace their lineage to the New Left (for instance the CCCS), concerned themselves with the manifestation of the counterculture in terms of the way it reflected a position in relation to the forces of production, rendering any underlying discursive or intellectual content at most a secondary concern. This approach did not explore beyond the outward styles of dissent: the nature of a countercultural ideology was read through the encoded signs of dress, lifestyle and music. It is apparent from the underground press however that the nature of this dissent was expressed in less ephemeral ways: this was a more intellectually motivated, albeit amorphous, revolt, not simply a gesture of disaffiliation.

As a source, the underground press re-presents social science to the researcher. These publications were forged in the same environment as the New Left, and helped frame the intellectual and cultural moment from which new and influential perspectives on society and culture emerged. The New Left, as represented by commentators like Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart sought to redefine modes of political expression and attempted to assert the role of

culture in the make-up of political consciousness and social repression. Similarly, countercultural rebellion as it was expressed in the underground press recognised those same new perspectives and utilised them in a particular form of dissent. For the social scientist whose disciplinary traditions can be located within these same and subsequent developments, their own discourses are contained, if implicitly, in the text of the underground press. Frequently, the project of the counterculture was self-consciously sociological, an applied critical theory attempting to articulate and destabilise imposed structures through cultural practice. London underground papers like the *International Times* and *Oz* were concerned to do just this.

To study the counterculture through the underground press begs an acknowledgement of not only the broader socio-cultural, intellectual, economic and historical processes, but a recognition of the counterculture's own understanding and negotiation with those processes. Such a negotiation is clearly present in the rhetoric and content of the underground press, whether it is an amalgam of the scientific and the mystical, or an explicit use of certain received theories.

The nature of countercultural revolt is complex. They took on board a series of conflicting theories and perspectives, apparently disregarding or unaware of their contradictions. This has been interpreted as some sort of end to ideology, a characteristically late-modern or post-modern form of rebellion, expressing itself in a mutated form of commodity fetishism. Indeed many commentators have identified the counterculture as one of the first manifestations of a post-modern consciousness (Berman 1983: 15–32, MacCannell 1992: 127–130). The 'affirmative' visionaries of modernism who influenced the style and content of countercultural revolt, like Marshall McLuhan, Susan Sontag and John Cage, were labelled 'Post-modernists' by Marshall Berman because they opened themselves up to the 'immense variety and richness of things, materials and ideas that the modern world inexhaustibly brought forth' (Berman 1983: 32). And there is quite some justification for this assertion: many of the writers proclaiming this new world order appeared as regular contributors in the underground press; Theodore Roszak, Marshall McLuhan, R.D. Laing, Buckminster Fuller, Paul Goodman, Jeff Nuttall and so on.

For a number of the counterculture's favoured theorists and commentators at the time the watershed was the dawn of the nuclear age. Post-Hiroshima, the idea of victory in war became 'idiotic', 'absurd' (Wright-Mills 1982: 77) and the veil of a rationally based morality somehow enshrined in the modern epoch was lifted. The conviction that post-war youth had 'strontium 90 in their bones', that, 'the spectre of nuclear war' was 'before them from the moment of their birth' (Bromwich 1970: 55) resonates in much contemporaneous analysis. Jeff Nuttall's account in *Bomb Culture* (1968) develops this thesis more than most. The post-war generation's membership of the 'H-bomb society automatically cancelled anything they might have to say on questions of right and wrong' (Nuttall 1968: 21). For Nuttall, this curiously a-moral existential revolt celebrated the here and now, the principles of existence only made sense 'in terms of the moment, to the people who were trapped within it' (Nuttall 1968: 29). The future was a void, dealt with by countercultural

movements with an 'abstract pattern of behaviour', this void revealed the 'fallacy of logic and rationality' (Nuttall 1968: 73). The events of the late 1960s were explained in Nuttall's analysis by the failure of earlier post-war revolts to affect the course of nuclear proliferation. As a consequence, this generation became 'passive', living existentially for sensation; an act completed was an 'identity established', an identity established was a 'relationship acknowledged, and no entity outside ourselves and our implicit instincts was to be trusted' (Nuttall 1968: 114). This tendency for withdrawal would be picked up by critics on the Left and the sociological establishment (see also Boyer 1984).

Re-materialising the Cultural Geography of Sixties London

It is important that I address the themes of the series of which this book is part, re-materialising cultural geography. Of late there has been a tension within the discipline of geography that can be characterised as articulations of two different of two different takes on the deployment of 'material'. On one side is the now established approach to cultural geography in which the understanding and interpretation of culture and representation are closely tied to a set of contextual material circumstances, albeit that most work is now quite distant from the broadly Marxist sense of the 'material' that was originally proposed. On the other side are more recent, mostly theoretical developments that are characterised by a rejection of representation as process, practice and object of research. These non-representational approaches conceive of the material and materiality as processually emergent rather than fixed and definite, something that cannot be captured and framed either practically or theoretically. It is worth recovering some familiar ground to get a sense of this current tension and to suggest a resolution on which the concept of materiality is, albeit implicitly, deployed throughout the rest of this book.

When agendas were being set for the new cultural geography in the mid-1980s one approach suggested was to utilise a notion of culture and cultural politics that that had been developed by critical theorists in the social sciences and humanities over the previous 20 years. Geographers were asked to attend to culture as a politically contested social construction and to do so they needed to adopt a broad conception of culture that moved beyond a focus on elite cultural forms and explored more popular and resistant forms of cultural practice. This argument was often backed-up by and founded upon the pioneering work of the CCCS. What this perspective provided was quite a neat and systematic way of understanding culture as a process and the connection of that process to changes in the political economy, or in other words 'material' circumstances. Culture was not simply a function of the political economy, but crucial to creating the circumstances for political and economic change. Cultural change and changes in the political economy were thus entwined and inseparable. Culture has a direct connection to the material base in this conceptualisation because culture is the medium through which people use

everyday resources and transform them into objects and practices that are invested with symbolic meaning and value. Culture is political too because it is also the medium through which different versions of the world, as expressed through these meanings and values, are contested.

It would be a mistake to assume however that this purist rendering of culture and its processes characterised the majority of the early work in new cultural geography. In part this is because it is an incomplete historiography of the sub-discipline. It is not often acknowledged that humanistic approaches had a lesser influence on the early new cultural geography. For instance, in the US where there was already a long and established history of cultural geography, the move to new cultural geography revolved around the rejection of established Sauerian approaches to cultural geography which viewed culture as pre-given, or 'superorganic', rather than a process. In the rejection of these established approaches, American cultural geographers initially emphasised the role of the individual in affecting and changing culture in a kind of humanist Marxism (see Olwig 2010, Price 2010). British cultural geographers, although many emerged from the ranks of historical geographers grounded in archive work and landscape interpretation, similarly carried forward some aspects of humanist approaches which did not necessarily sit comfortably with Marxist takes on culture. Whilst it is not my intention here to detail these more 'immaterial' roots and characteristics of new cultural geography, it is important to note that cultural geographers have always engaged with the less palpable, in for instance a concern for aesthetics and the import of ideas and vision (not just the visual). Indeed, it is perhaps these recently reinvigorated vestiges of a more immaterial humanistic focus that has caused Don Mitchell to call for a return to the fundamentals and to reconnect with the 'material', to re-materialise the sub-discipline. Mitchell's challenge is focused precisely upon re-deploying Marxian sense of the material because the project of new cultural geography proclaimed in the mid-1980s has not, for him, run its course. Indeed, it has lost its way (Mitchell 2000). But there is another challenge to the work of cultural geographers that is perhaps more fundamental.

Contemporary non-representational theory has a very different notion of re-materialising the sub-discipline to that of Mitchell's. Non-representational theory presents representational practices – particularly academic representational practices – as actions which firstly objectify the world; secondly, codify and thereby confer stability of identity upon it; and thirdly, in doing so, tend only to exercise oral, cognitive and visual ways of knowing (see Castree and MacMillan 2004). Non-representational thought focuses upon practice above and before representation because practice encapsulates non-cognitive thought – thought which is not guided by a set of internalised expectations (or received representations). Non-cognitive thought leads to action: it is 'a set of embodied dispositions ("instincts" if you like) which have been biologically wired in or culturally sedimented … action-oriented "representations" which simultaneously describe aspects of the world and prescribe possible actions' (Thrift 2000a: 36). Whilst representation still has some import here then, it is practical intelligibility and inarticulate understanding that form the

lens through which representations are generated and rendered understandable. Central to this notion of cognitive unconscious is a sense of embodiment, that to experience the world is a co-relational process whereby the 'body produces spaces and times through the things of nature which, in turn, inhabit the body through that production' (Thrift 2000a: 47). Knowledge and representations are generated through this process. We know our bodies through knowing nature and vice-versa: 'a heightened awareness of particular forms of embodiment [in for instance certain contemplative practices] ... allow certain forms of signification to be grasped "instinctively"' (Thrift 2000a: 46).

To illustrate – although that word of course is highly charged in this instance – I will use a 1960s countercultural performance. Imagine that you were participating as a member of the audience at a happening in 1965. On stage is a conceptual artist called John Latham (1921–2006) and a full set of leather-bound *Encyclopaedia Britannica* arranged in a spiralling pile. The artist sets fire to the book tower, which he calls a 'Skoob tower' (that is, 'books' backwards), and you watch it burn. You cheer and clap along with others in the crowd. But what and why are you applauding? If you have knowledge of this artist and what drives him you might be applauding his attack on the 'word'. You will know that Latham attributes the ills of the world to conflicting ideologies and contradictory theories all of which find expression in the debilitating linear format of the written word. You will know too that he is in the process of developing a single theoretical framework that proposes to be a unified explanation of existence. If you have engaged with this project then you will be aware that he has rejected the explanations of modern cosmologists and that everything that exists is better explained as recurring time-based events of finite duration rather than as atomic particles and/or waves. Recurring events of the longest duration result in complex phenomena like the cosmos and the objects that make it, events of a shortest duration, or 'least events', are the fundamental building blocks of existence. The habitual recurrence of least duration events forms the basis for structures of reality. If you know this then you have probably seen his 1954 painting *Man Caught Up With a Yellow Object* which attempts to represent this universal view by using tiny specks of paint from a spray gun, each speck the result of an event of varying duration (how long the spray gun was spraying) the habitual repetition of these events brings 'the man' of the title into being from the nothingness of the canvas.

The likelihood is of course that you might not be aware of the confusing philosophy behind Latham's practice, even if you were one of his students at St Martin's. Because you are at the event you will be aware of the recent fashion for attacks on or manipulations of the word and on other more conventional forms of communication, so Latham's representational intent will not be as important as your interpretation of his performance as part of that genre. So far the take on culture proposed by the majority of cultural geographers will account for these contexts of production and consumption in their interpretation and divination of meaning from the event. Indeed the dematerialisation of the object in the form of an immolated tower of books would in itself probably feature in their accounts.

Non-representational approaches on the other hand would suggest that the idea made material in the Skoob tower is not the important aspect of materiality in this case. Rather the focus should be on the dynamics of the event, of, for instance the ways in which networks of human and non-human subjects, material and immaterial objects circulate to give the event moment and momentum. So, the meaning of the representation is far less important than the networks that sustain, transmit and evolve the representation. Likewise materiality is less about ideas made concrete (or paper, leather and fire) than the interplay between the material and the immaterial.

This new understanding of materiality is then thoroughly networked and bound with the immaterial. There is no point at which the 'material' is fixed because it is always becoming, always provisional. It differs from the understanding of the 'material' as engendered in the new cultural geography in precisely this regard. Above all, in non-representational thinking there is an abandonment of causal explanation, a turn away from the idealisation of meaning common to structuralist and neo-structuralist approaches because they tend to render dull and lifeless their objects and subjects of study (de Certeau 1984, 1986, Dewsbury 2000, Doel 1999, Harrison 2000, Latour 1999). The work of cultural geography for instance is accused of presenting 'vapid certainties', of committing 'genetic fallacies' by connecting the value or meaning of an event to its genesis in history and/or socio-economic context, its material circumstances (Thrift 2000b: 215). Here, cultural activity is not directed by nor the symbolisation of a set of given rules from which its meaning derives, rather, the cultural meanings of a particular landscape for instance, are impossible to detach from lived practice and experience of that landscape (see for example Wylie 2002, Rose 2002). In an attempt to escape the 'cloying hegemony of the cultural turn' (Thrift 2000b: 245) then, non-representational approaches, whilst acknowledging that certain versions – representations – of the world are given greater credence than others, this is not to be understood within the accepted cultural studies framework. Rather, networks of power constrain the potential of events by ensuring their iterability, but events have the potential to escape these networks, to remake the world.

What is beginning to emerge from non-representational studies is a concept of a new subject – a new humanity even – that is formed and constantly reformed in co-relation to things in the object world – animal, mineral, viral, vegetable and technological – and with other human subjects. Much recent work for instance has developed new apprehensions of nature whereby the formation of human subjects is intricately entangled with the presence and actions of non-human subjects (Whatmore 2002). The intellectual effort in this work is intent upon questioning lineal thought and focusing upon fluid and unpredictable complexities: 'Increasingly, we have ... come to appreciate the fluidity and instability of the (multiple) ontological boundaries which separate thinglike from nonthinglike entities (persons, animals, relations, concepts), in a growing discomfort about the traditional hierarchies which separated subjects from objects, cultures from natures, and humans from nonhumans' (Pels *et al.* 2002: 3). The role of technology

in this vitalist network has also become an important focus and it could be argued that the extension of human bodies and minds through technological advance has ushered in contemporary notions of embodiment. Humanity 'is technical from the start, amplified and speeded up by the demands of an "environment" which does not keep to its environs' (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000: 419, see also Thrift and French 2002). The new human subject is the product of the enhanced capacities afforded by technology to the point that the boundary between the self and object world become redundant and the human self is redefined. Consciousness itself is also extended into the environment as a result of expanded communicative and memorising capacities of human and non-human subjects (Thrift 2003, 2004).

I want to suggest that there are very few fundamental differences or contradictions between these two deployments of the 'material'. Much non-representational work that targets the notion of 'culture' and cultural processes used by cultural geographers does not engage extensively in analysis of how that notion is construed and set to work. I suspect that most new cultural geographers will not find non-representational accounts of the socio-cultural process of representation too different from their own (see for example Matless 2000, Nash 2000 and compare Rose 2002). Indeed the limits to representation have not only always been acknowledged by cultural geographers, but not necessarily explored. The new sense of materiality emerging from the 'non-cultural' cultural geography then could be considered a reaction to the call always made but rarely heeded by cultural geographers, to make a concerted effort to look beyond the modes and contexts of production to modes of consumption and embodiment. Maybe that call was rarely heeded because works of 'high' culture have often been the focus of attention. When one begins to explore more popular and more contemporary modes of representation it becomes clear that the enfranchisement of meaning through consumption often makes the contexts of production far less immanent. They are more inclusive and less illusive and make didactic statements of meaning far more difficult to discern.

The two apparently contradictory apprehensions of the 'material' can be resolved around a more nuanced understanding of representation and specifically an approach that addresses the fundamental changes to the practices of representation that characterised the twentieth century. There was a shift in the register of representation that emerges throughout the twentieth century and found expression in a range of activities including several countercultural practices. This shift relied less on the visual and more on *vision* and was based upon the development of a new cosmology and an associated apprehension of nature which was developed in technoscientific discourse and circulated in a range of cultural, political and everyday practices. During the 1960s this new conception of a multi-dimensional, infinitely complex cosmic nature resulted in a range of practices that eschewed traditional forms of representation and attempted to develop more intuitive, embodied and multi-sensory modes of expression, such as in the multi-media lightshow, developments in underground cinema aesthetics, performance art, painting, and experiments with the written word on the pages

of certain underground publications (Rycroft 2005, 2007). The intention in these practices was not to produce static, enframed and frozen representations of nature, but to create microcosmic 'models' of the marcocosmos that were intended to be experienced in a multi-sensory embodied mode – not unlike John Latham's work noted above.

Nature and its representation was still the object and subject of representation but that nature was understood in a fundamentally different way. This was not so much a crisis of representation but a new form of representation based upon a remade vision. It is difficult precisely to date the first evocations of these kinds of cosmic natures. Certainly by the immediate post-war period a range of practices began to express it. During the Second World War, debates in planning philosophy for instance recognised that twentieth-century developments in architecture were beginning to reflect a post-Newtonian cosmology by employing a more 'intuitive conception' of the universe, one which expressed an order of nature that was almost inconceivably complex and subtle (Kallman and McCallum 1944: 253). This departure from old ideas of matter and form involved searching beyond external form to hidden, underlying organisation. That organisation was only just beginning to be revealed by science. For the influential art and design theorist Gyorgy Kepes, developments in modern physics and non-Euclidean geometry drove a new desire within and beyond the academy to describe reality with far more subtlety and power and so bring this newly conceived cosmology to human senses – to make the invisible visible. Science, Kepes said, had opened up resources for 'new sights and sounds, new tastes and textures': 'If we are to understand the new landscape, we need to touch it with our senses and build the images that will make it ours. For this we must remake our vision' (Kepes 1956: 20, see also Rycroft 1996a). Furthermore, although this is not the place to argue it, it is possible to see non-representational approaches as one of the most recent manifestations of this shift.

It would be easy to employ a systematic framework to explain this shift, to for instance, emphasise its connection to aligned shifts in the material base and an emergent post-industrialism in which these new modes of representation were simply exciting new products for mass consumption. However it has become very clear to me from my research that other factors motivated both the production and consumption of new modes of representation. Coupled with the shift in the register of representational practises then was a revision of the understanding of materiality and of being in the world that cannot be explained simply with reference to political economic processes.

A final example to help pin these ideas: In January 1967 the first London underground paper *International Times*, or *IT* carried an advert for 'The What? Box' (see Figure 1.1), a functionless and apparently meaningless gadget designed to 'amuse your humourless dog, confuse your neurotic friends', 'an original gift for Mum'. The What? Box was completely sealed with eight 'eyes', or lights of different colours that winked on and off in no recognisable pattern and for no apparent reason. It ran like this for around one year and then died, beyond repair. 'THE WHAT? BOX ACHIEVES NOTHING – MEANINGFULLY'. The advert

Figure 1.1 **The What? Box advert from *International Times* (16 January 1967)**

Source: © *IT* with thanks to www.international-times.org.uk.

is playful in its allusions to commodity fetishism, to built-in obsolescence, and to the technocratic control of consciousness – 'A compact computer? A spy system? A brain washing device?' – all contemporary concerns of the radical New Left.

Both senses of the material coexist in this one object. There was no apparent authorial meaning in the object – it referred to and represented essentially nothing. In common with much cultural production of the time, meaning was generated through consumption, through multi-sensory interaction with the object (see Chapter 8). We could take a Marxian inspired perspective on materialism and interpret this, as the advert suggests, as a self-conscious and ironic comment on built-in obsolescence, the ultimate in commodity fetishism, an object of desire and cultural capital. It is probably not coincidental that the advert appears on the same page as an article by William Burroughs on the potential use of tape recording technologies to deprogramming the individual from hegemonic control, or that it is the only publication in which I have found the advert. Equally then, the What? Box could be understood as a referent and celebration of high-tech multi-media, a performative genre that was, by the time that the advert appears, in its ascendancy and, as we will see throughout the book, one which had a very similar take on 'material' to that of non-representational thinking. Technology was considered an extension of humanity in terms of physicality and consciousness, a newly realised relationship in which it was understood that humanity itself was co-constituted by material and non-material, human and non-human co-relations and intimately bound with a newly conceived cosmic nature. In short, both senses and understandings of the material and materiality exist at once. There is little to be gained from separating them.

A Note on Structure

I have divided the book into two parts. The first deals with the origins of the swinging imagination of the city in terms of aesthetic and stylistic roots and the second, the emergence and character of the counterculture in London. I have not however separated these parts out into defined sections because whilst I want to make clear that the Londons of the first and second half of the 1960s are very different places, there are connections between them and the motive for writing this account of the swinging city is to outline those connections.

The next two chapters are given over to exploring the mostly 1950s origins of Swinging London. By the end of the 1950s and as a result of a close engagement with Pop Art and the Independent Group, cultural critic Lawrence Alloway in his essay 'The Long Front of Culture' first published in 1959, issued a call to arms against received notions of and indeed the objects of elite culture. Celebrating the explosion in all forms of media and communication as both source and inspiration for artistic expression, Alloway suggested that a shift in the definition of culture itself was required and had been suggested by developments in artistic expression over the previous decade:

> The abundance of twentieth-century communications is an embarrassment to
> the traditionally educated custodian of culture. The aesthetics of plenty oppose
> a very strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of an elite …
> Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is.
> Instead of reserving the word for the highest artifacts and the noblest thoughts
> of history's top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of 'what
> a society does'. (Alloway 1969: 31)

This long front of culture emerged then as a result of dissolving previous rigidities
in the conception of culture, morals, taste and manners.

Taking Alloway's redefined notion of culture as its rationale the next two
chapters are loosely divided into two broad foci: the first explores the emergence
of the swinging style in literary movements of the 1950s; and the second, the
origins and expression of swinging aesthetics in visual culture broadly defined.
The accounts of both are not intended to be exhaustive but work through aspects
and developments that I consider key to understanding London of the later 1960s
and early 1970s and to demonstrate just how long the long front was. Some of
these might appear quite distant both geographically and figuratively from what
we know about Swinging London, but they have been chosen because they each
help elaborate the roots of what became Swinging London, but more importantly
they share, albeit implicitly, similar visions. In other words despite their varied
origins they embody post-war values and outlooks that helped shape the various
aspects of the swinging city that are explored later in the book.

Chapter 4, 'Mapping Swinging London' is the last chapter covering the swinging
imagination and describes the outcome of some of the aesthetic and literary
developments explored in the previous two chapters. It presents the stereotypical
image of the swinging city as it was imagined in the media, especially through the
now celebrated Swinging London issue of *Time* magazine from 15 April 1966. The
chapter maps *Time*'s representation of culture and society of mid-1960s London
by connecting it to other representations and other happenings in the city.

The next four chapters then explore the emergence and character of
countercultural or 'underground' London from around 1966 to 1974. Chapter 5
races the history of London's counterculture through an analysis of the rise and fall
of the city's first underground publication, *International Times*, and a focus on a
few key moments and events that defined the character of the city's counterculture.
For the most part these are not spectacular events like demonstrations against the
Vietnam War or mass sit-ins, but nonetheless definitive in the sense that they
established or articulated key ideas and philosophies that gave form to the cultural
politics of the counterculture.

Chapter 6, 'Rephrasing and Reimagining Dissent' explores one of the most
important ideas for the character of London's counterculture. It suggests that the
cultural politics of the city's underground were defined by attempts to develop new
modes of expression designed to overcome perceived hegemonic and technocratic
control. To develop these cultural politics the counterculture appropriated a series

of ideas and thoughts such as those of the literary theorist and media studies pioneer Marshall McLuhan. These ideas were reflective of new visions of the cosmos, humanity, nature and technology developed in the post-war period and much of Chapter 6 is given over to their exploration.

Chapter 7, '*Oz*, London and Cosmic Consciousness' examines the representational geographies of London's and one of the world's most famous underground publications, *Oz*. More so than other publications in the city (or at least for a more sustained period) *Oz* embodied the ideas of the anti-technocratic cultural politics of communication explored in Chapter 6. It also represented the more popular or stereotypically 'hippy' aspect of London's counterculture and as such was both influential and infamous as the 1971 obscenity prosecution suggests. One of the reasons that I focus explicitly on *Oz* however, is that it helps demonstrate the earnestness with which the counterculture explored non-standard forms of politicking and, for a movement so often accused of happy mysticism and apathy, how carefully worked out their cultural politics were.

Chapter 8, the last of the four chapters on underground London, moves away from a focus on the texts and aesthetics of the city's underground press and focuses on the development of multi-media lightshows. In writing about these performative practices my intention is to show that the vision of a recently conceived cosmic nature found expression in the non-textual strategies of the counterculture's cultural politics. Indeed it is probably the most explicit expression. In lightshows one can trace another aspect of the shift in the register of representation in the post-war period as well as the cultural politics of underground London. Both of these elements are then picked up in a brief concluding chapter.

I have chosen the date range 1950-1974 to encompass two punctuation marks significant to the cultural geography of post-war London. Beginning the account in 1950 enables me to explore the development of planning, architectural, literary and artistic aesthetics as they impacted upon the imagination and morphology of the city, including for instance the establishment of the Festival of Britain. The end date, 1974, is the year in which *International Times*, London's first and largest countercultural underground publication, ceased regular publication, although it continued sporadically for another twelve years. Beyond that date it is very difficult to detect the kinds of cultural and aesthetic strategies that are of interest to this book and that had previously defined the swinging city.

Chapter 2

The Long Front of Material and Immaterial Culture I: Beat and Angry

Both old and middle age are blind
To read the alphabet I write
Their longest journey lies behind …
And so my speech must be confined
To those who taste our epoch's plight
Both old and middle age are blind
(John Wain (1951) extract from *Who Speaks My Language*, cited in Morrison (1980: 111-112)).

We begin as promised with the non-metropolitan, specifically with the provincial and the transatlantic. The style, aesthetics and social order of Swinging London had a global geographical history, so much so that many of the innovations with which London of the 1960s became associated were in fact not of London. Whilst novel knowledges and practices have their points of origin they frequently find a home, even a better home, somewhere else. This is certainly the case with respect to the social and cultural transformation of London in the post-war period and the way that it absorbed a number of provincial avant-garde aesthetics and influences from across the Atlantic. In post-war Britain, it was the English provincial city that first experienced a renaissance, but from the late 1950s onwards the capital reasserted its role as a site for cultural avant-garde experimentation and as a national and transnational cultural mediator. This was in part due to the appropriation of cultural production from the provinces both in terms of the appropriation of styles and the migration of the cultural producers themselves. So little account has been taken of this cultural–geographical appropriation that it would almost seem an organic process not worthy of comment: that the capital and its hinterland are somehow the natural arbiters of a nation's established and radical culture. The nature and dynamics of this process are implicit to but beyond the scope of this account of London. Similarly, it is not possible to trace all of the lines of influence here, so I want to alight upon aesthetic strategies that help explain the happenings detailed later in the book in terms of the emergence of urban countercultures in the city.

In this chapter I focus on two literary movements from the 1950s one thoroughly British (if not resolutely English) and the other thoroughly American: the Angry Young Men and the Beat Generation. The latter is frequently sited with reference to its influence upon an emergent counterculture in terms of the development of particular philosophies and associated lifestyle practises (Goodman 1961, Neville 1995). The Angry Young Men on the other hand are rarely considered of import

to the British counterculture except in the sense of their generation of a general atmosphere of anti-establishment disquiet and vague rebelliousness. Because the Beat Generation influence on the 1960s counterculture is well covered elsewhere, not least by members of the counterculture themselves in underground press articles and reminiscences of the period, more space is devoted to the Angry Young Men here.

Despite the many differences between the two movements, not least in their roots and trajectories, there are common themes in their aesthetics. Here then, I want to emphasise the import of ideas, not at first material but nevertheless with material consequences and influence in both cause and effect. The interest in these immaterial ideas is not only in outlining their nature and shape but also is mapping out how they were put to work. In the work of both the Angry Young Men and the Beat Generation one can locate one of the first post-war renderings of newly emerging ideas about the interrelationships between nature, humanity and technology – what I termed 'cosmic natures' in the Chapter 1. It is reasonable to assume that these versions of the new imaginings were subject to countercultural appropriation later in the 1960s because they were written by the kinds of authors that they were likely to consume and because they were complemented by other versions of the idea circulating in different social and cultural practices – in philosophy, art, architecture and planning – around the same time. Each articulation of the idea tended to emphasise different aspects: In the case of the Angry Young Men it is inflected by the (sometimes contradictory) philosophical rejection of logical positivism; and in the case of the Beats there was a more explicit almost ecological concern for refiguring the relationships between nature and humanity.

Apart from these conceptual aspects there are also more practical purposes for discussing Beat and Angry writing here. For the Angry Young Men the story of the post-war provincial renaissance, its dynamics and aesthetics, is best told through their experience. The story of the Beat generation, which is told mostly through an account of one of their most iconic figures and 'one of the people with whom the entire movement had started' (Fountain 1988: 94), Jack Kerouac, helps establish the fact that the increased cultural influence of the United States upon Britain after the Second World War did not simply revolve around popular or mass cultural forms of material or immaterial culture.

Beats

No account of the 1960s counterculture in any city would be complete without at least brief mention of the Beat Generation. More so than the Angry Young Men, the Beats' influence on the 1960s was not solely based upon their literary output, but also their cultural politics, modes of performance and practice. Countercultural factions such as the commune movement, the Diggers, and the student radical all traced their heritage to the 1940s and 50s beat movement. The West Coast Renaissance which Beat literature both heralded and sparked was

seen as a renaissance of the human spirit that would capture theoreticians of the counterculture such as Murray Bookchin, Paul Goodman and Charles Reich, and informed the nature of the underground, providing a 'subterranean awareness' upon which the civil rights movement and the counterculture could build (Reich 1971: 188). Similarly, a range of countercultural practices from the be-in to psychedelic style and multi-media aesthetics also drew upon experiments and ideas developed by the Beats. The 1960s, the most 'schizophrenic change' in the 'temper of our times' then, was predicted a decade before, 'implicit in every poem, novel and prose piece produced by the Beat Generation' (Cook 1971: 4).

The dissent of the beats was not conventionally ideological, it was a personal and spiritual revolt, more than a social or political rebellion, and it is in this aspect, along with elements of the lifestyles portrayed in Beat fiction, that would have the most profound effect upon the counterculture. For the purposes of this account I want to draw out three interrelated aspects of Beat aesthetics that I feel were most influential when considering the counterculture and especially London's counterculture of the late 1960s. The first is the anti-technocratic cultural politics associated with post-Hiroshima poetics; the second is related to the performative innovations made by Beat writers in the development of putative multi-media practices; and the third is a rendering of the relationship between technology and nature where the former need not have technocratic associations in order to shed new light on the latter.

The Beat Generation is commonly referred to in the context of five major figures, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso and Gary Snyder. Like their Angry contemporaries in Britain, the Beat Generation can be considered another facet of an evolving anti-technocratic consciousness in post-war society. In Charles Reich's (1971) words, they were the first sub-culture to articulate 'the loss of America'. 'They had all read Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and took it for granted that civilization was collapsing around them. The atomic bomb had just been dropped on Japan, and that was proof enough. The early Beats had no hope of trying to change society' (Miles 1989: 73). That emphasis on post-Hiroshima fear of nuclear annihilation pervades many critiques of the Beat Generation with accounts of Dionysian or nihilistic aspects of their work and lifestyle directly connected to fear of immanent nuclear destruction. Whilst there certainly is a sense that these accounts tend to be overly technologically deterministic, the iconography of nuclear apocalypse was common, leading Kerouac's biographer Gerald Nicosia to conclude that Kerouac's generation was fleeing a different kind of cloud to that of the Dust Bowl migrants, one 'made of atomic particles and shaped like a mushroom – a cloud so powerful that even the threat of it was stifling' (Nicosia 1986: 169–233). Not surprisingly then, one of the favoured outlets for early Beat writing was Jay Landesman's appropriately named magazine *Neurotica* that catered for this post-Hiroshima aesthetic.

From the outset, the Beats' anti-technocratic tendencies were more explicit than those of their transatlantic contemporaries and revolved around a post-Hiroshima bomb culture. Central to this anti-technocratic stance was a sense of

spirituality and asceticism which whilst more clearly articulated in the work of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, is also present in Jack Kerouac's writing. For John Clellon Holmes, a peripheral member of the Beat Generation and one of the first to publish an account of their lifestyle in his novel *Go* (1952), this is what differentiated the characters of Jack Kerouac's most famous novel *On the Road*, from the 'slum-bred petty criminals and icon-smashing Bohemians ... in much modern American fiction'. What gave these characters their Beatness and upset the critics most, was Kerouac's insistence that they were on a quest, and the 'specific object of that quest was spiritual'. Although they 'rushed back and forth across the country on the slightest pretext, gathering kicks along the way, their real journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and moral, it was only in the hope of finding a belief on the other side' (in Feied 1964: 57). This also captured sociologist and poet Paul Goodman: The Beats' traditional principles of 'classical mysticism' were based on a belief in experience, that through experience '(=kicks)', they could 'transcend the nagged and nagging self altogether'. Resigning from society, they form 'peaceful brotherhoods of pure experience, with voluntary poverty, devotional readings, and a good deal of hashish'. For Goodman however, the 'religious effort' of the Beat Generation was doomed to failure because they were casting off one Rat Race only to fall into one of their own construction, their own products doomed to appropriation (Goodman 1970: 130–137).

Whilst the Beat Generation were not immune from self mythologising in this regard – Kerouac for instance referred to his movement as wandering mystics 'unputdownable' and 'Gandhi-like' (Kerouac 1958: 20) – Beat writers, in their recasting of American cultural heroes depicted by the older protest writers did develop new perspectives on mobility and individual freedom (see Cresswell 1993, Rycroft 1996b). For the second half of the twentieth century, the Beat Generation reworked this theme in for instance Allen Ginsberg's 'new ecological perspective' which used the 'natural man' as distinct from 'capitalist or police state man' and in Kerouac's mourning of the decline of the 'wandering hobo saint' for whom the road was   belief no longer open (Knight and Knight 1978). These figures were imbued with mystical and legendary status especially in Kerouac's writing. Most Beats found a sense of intellectual and spiritual justification in Buddhism, particularly Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg. Kerouac was less committed but for a time practiced a brand of Catholic Buddhism derived from his explorations of Thoreau's interest in Hindu philosophy and expressed most explicitly in his novels *The Dharma Bums* (1959) and *Desolation Angels* (1960). This spirituality is only putative in Kerouac's most famous novel *On the Road* (1957) and should not be overstated (Fields 1981: 210–233, Charters 1973: 199–200, 259–260).

What is significant about *On the Road* that relates directly to some of the developments taken up by the counterculture later in the 1960s was the way in which Kerouac experiments with non–linear forms of language and expression. Influenced by William Burroughs (see Chapter 6) Kerouac's subversion of the word arose in the integration of bop rhythm into the construction of sentences.
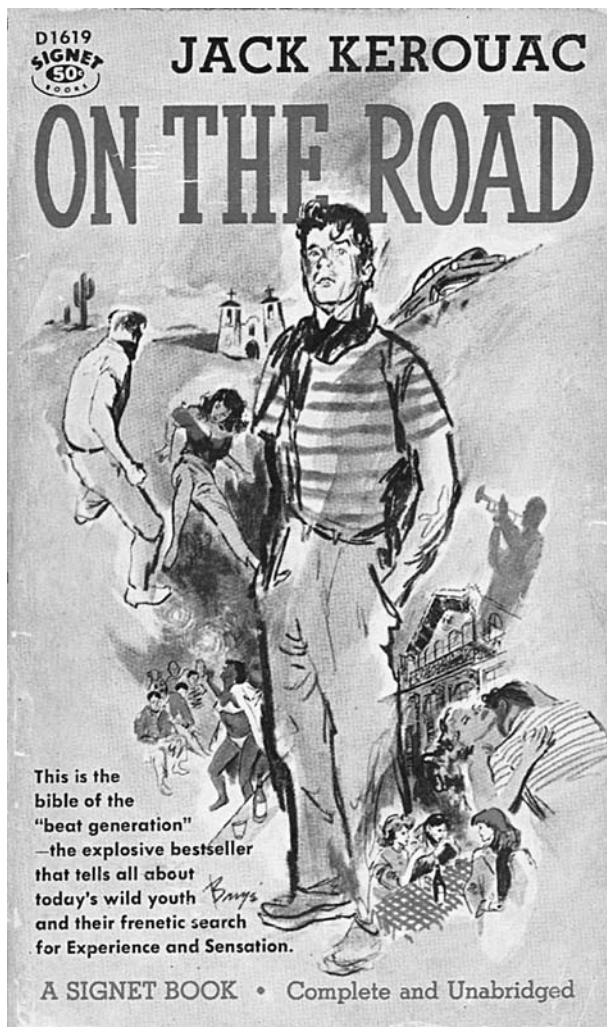
Figure 2.1   The 1958 Signet paperback edition of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*

Not only did jazz and bop fit well with an erratic, spontaneous lifestyle, but also with Kerouac's way of recording it. Modern jazz is characterised by innovation, a constant movement and informal beginnings and endings. Kerouac's prose style fits a rhythm, lines are structured so that despite the lack of punctuation and formal sentences, the reader flows through prose and landscape, and like his representation of the Beat Generation, avoided mundane structures and laws. *On the Road* was written in a few weeks on a teletype role given to Kerouac by a

journalist friend Lucien Carr with whom he was living. Initially, the manuscript had no punctuation, paragraphs or chapters, but was typed, over a period of three weeks, by feeding the role through a manual typewriter: 'No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas – but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases)'. This informal structure not only moved, but, like William Carlos William's poetry, faithfully represented the 'measured pauses which are the essentials of our speech' (Kerouac 1992: 57). When the book finally found a willing publisher, Kerouac was forced to edit the novel into a more traditional structure.

There are precise parallels between Kerouac's writing style and jazz music. Whilst *On the Road* was in the planning stages Kerouac corresponded with Ed White, a friend from Columbia University, on the way he should go about faithfully representing characters and action. He saw the only way out of 'self conscious Art' lay along the lines of modern musical composition, wanting to discover 'the basic tones of existence' as they were embodied in both characters and the human character generically (Nicosia 1986: 336). With these tones he planned to organise variations as in jazz. Such writing would comprise large sections of dialogue and the endless talk would be structured by the classic repeatable jazz pattern of '18 bars bridge and take out 8 bars'. If one character got 'really blowing' Kerouac would let them take further 'choruses' until their emotions were spent. Various combinations of characters in discussion achieved the effect of instruments responding to one another in a band. As he explained to White, when 'No.1 talks to No.2 and No.3, it is not the same as No.1 talking to No.2 alone or 2 and 3 discussing 1, or all three silent together, or 3 alone in his eternity' (in Nicosia 1986: 336). When all the characters were silent, the author's voice would take over in a 'choral hymn' or 'oratorio'.

Although Kerouac was by no means the main figure in this kind of literary experimentation (Burroughs was certainly more innovative), his popularity and accessorily meant that was undoubtedly the most influential. These early experiments in non-linear expression were also however reflective of the performance and consumption of Beat literature. Writers would perform their poetry and prose in clubs and coffee houses accompanied by jazz musicians. Jazz-poetry venues were established especially on the West Coast of America to cater for this new style of performance. For me, these venues can rightly claim to be the first multi-media environmental shows (sometimes called 'happenings' later in the 1960s) and the foundations upon which lightshow artists would build in the mid- to late 1960s (see Chapter 8). The crime fiction writer turned beatnik patriarch Lawrence Lipton wrote about the importance of these jazz-poetry venues in his account of the Venice Beat community in Los Angeles *The Holy Barbarians* (1959). Lipton compares the Beat community in Venice to the first Christians, developing their own rituals and sacraments unadorned with civilized trappings. Rituals and myths were seen to give cohesiveness to a community whose ultimate objective was to find new ways of knowing; 'wholeness, personal salvation, in a word, holiness, and the artist has always been in search of it' (Lipton 1959: 168). 'What then is this

self that the Holy Barbarian is constantly exploring? It is a search for the "Original Face" [after Alan Watts]. His basic, "original nature"'. The reading of poetry and poetry accompanied by jazz in the district were interpreted by Lipton as part of a revival in certain lost elements of oral or tribal culture, 'sparked by the electronics revolution in communication, by the phonograph, radio, tape recorder, and the audio-visual media of motion pictures and television' (Lipton 1959: 221).

In this statement Lipton prefigures the logic that we will see used later by the counterculture and its favoured theorists to explain a range of innovative practices aimed at expanding consciousness such as the underground press and the psychedelic lightshow. And it is the same theme developed by Kerouac in relation to the automobile: technology facilitated a spiritual leap backwards. Whilst there may have been an emphasis on the model lonesome traveller, the Beat Generation's iconography of mobility and the automobile transposed this quest into the search for ancient communities, oral cultures whose lives were uncomplicated by the trappings of technocracy. In *On the Road*, this quest finally finds its justification in the peasants of Mexico.

> They had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their heads for something they thought civilization had to offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and delusion of it. They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as them someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way. Our broken Ford, old thirties upgoing American Ford, rattled through them and vanished in the dust. (Kerouac 1988b: 281–282)

The automobile had become a metaphor for America and the American Dream and as such was venerated in popular culture (see Sanford 1983, Simmons 1983). In this sense, it also symbolised the technocratic mega-machine America, but, like the theme of mobility, could be appropriated and redefined in a subversive fashion. There is no tension, for example, between machine and garden in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974). The rationale of stripping and rebuilding an engine is reconciled with a contemplative and meditative lifestyle. The qualities of the machine are venerated because they are *extensions of ourselves* and as such have organic and spiritual meaning: 'The real cycle you're working on is a cycle called yourself. The Machine that appears to be "out there" and the person that appears to be "in here" are not two separate things' (Pirsig 1985: 293). In the passage from *On the Road* reproduced above, Kerouac exploits the metaphorical weight of the American automobile, but subverts it to symbolise the decay of America. Whilst at once, using Spengler's nomenclature, he extols the virtues of the simple 'Fellaheen' life of the Mexican peasants earlier in the account of the Mexican trip, he now points to the illusions of western 'civilization'. To Kerouac, Mexico represented a utopian existence without hassles, a 'timeless peace' with an easygoing lifestyle (Cassady 1990: 166).

Whilst the car is used as a technology of transcendence here its use also of course had technocratic outcomes. The reference to the Ford in the passage indicates this. The Ford motor company was the first to mass produce cars and indeed, the first to recognise the propaganda potential of the automobile by sponsoring films and TV shows (Hey 1983). Ford's production line was a microcosm of modern America's social and morphological landscape, both shaping and reflecting the social order, with its suburban monotony and social order based on the new industrial hierarchy. Kerouac's account of the loneliness and isolation of being the 'king of the Beat Generation' in *Big Sur* (1962) deals with the suburbanisation of America. Critical of the station wagons from the suburbs, with 'wifey, the boss of America, wearing dark glasses and sneering' (Kerouac 1989a: 44), he bemoans the lack of identity, loss of masculinity, and the commercialism of the suburbs. Feeling that the suburbs are intractable, he is unable to track the development of the suburban soul nor envisage any writer who could, because 'millions of people and events are piling up' (Kerouac 1989a: 63). In *The Dharma Bums* (1959) this 'middle-class non-identity' is criticised through the morphology of the Berkeley campus and the growth of residential zones which surround it. Rows of 'well-to-do houses with lawns and TV sets in each living room, with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time, whilst the Japhies [Gary Snyder] of this world go prowling the wilderness to find the ecstasy of the stars', locating the dark, mysterious origins of our 'faceless, wonderless, crapulous civilization' (Kerouac 1989b: 31). Frightening misogyny aside, here is technology as technocracy seen in the proliferation of the suburb and suburban domestic culture. Kerouac and the Beats, like Spengler, saw the fabric of American society disintegrating under this technocracy. The 'broken Ford' indicates this, and the allusions to the forthcoming apocalypse, whilst being disastrous to modern mobility, cracking bridges and roads and vanishing into the dust, holds up the hope that this may return a simple life of the hobo or gypsy. Technology could then facilitate a route to alternative ends not necessarily technocratic ones. Earlier in the journey the harmony of machine and garden in Kerouac's pastoral ideal is expressed:

> I jumped up on the steel roof of the car and stretched out flat on my back. Still there was no breeze, but the steel had an element of coolness in it and dried my back of sweat, clotting up thousands of dead bugs into cakes on my skins, and I realized the jungle takes you over and you become it. Lying on the top of the car with my face to the black sky was like lying in a closed trunk on a summer night. For the first time in my life the weather was not something that touched me, that caressed me, froze or sweated me, but became me. The atmosphere and I became the same. (Kerouac 1988b: 277).

In this passage, the car becomes, an instrument of the 'new vision', enabling the divination of some universal value in the world (Miles 1989: 47). Physically and ontologically the car is a vehicle, a method of getting from A to B, and a

mode of transcendence and a sacrament of renewal. This take on technology that allowed nature to be apprehended (sensed) anew encompassed in this passage and Beat aesthetics more generally is something that would go on to influence the counterculture.

Despite making these claims of connection between Beat culture and practices and the counterculture in the case of Kerouac, 'appropriation' is probably a better word. Kerouac disassociated himself from the counterculture, of which he, if only through his fiction, was an archetypal hero. For him, hippies who frequently turned up on his doorstep for food and autographs, were too iconoclastic, not patriotic, and worshipped false idols. Their lives were not mystical and transcendental as they claimed, for they escaped harsh reality without confronting it or viewing it in radically new ways:

> … those LSD heads in newspaper photographs who sit in parks gazing rapturously at the sky to show how high they are when they're only victims momentarily of a contraction of blood vessels and nerves in the Brain that causes the illusion of closure (a closing-up) of outside necessities. (Kerouac 1988c: 15)

Angries

It would perhaps seem counter-intuitive to begin searching for the roots of Swinging London and especially countercultural London in the work of the Angry Young Men. Aside from the lack of geographical propinquity, the stories of working-class, virulently masculine, frequently violent, and disquietingly fatalist protagonist suggest a more profound distance. However, whilst I am wary that there were divergent opinions amongst the group labelled 'Angry', there are two interrelated elements of the Angry aesthetic upon which the counterculture would later build. The first related to shifting perspectives on recognised modes political expression, of an emergent cultural politics associated with new styles of thought and expression which incorporated new, often American forms of popular culture, such as science fiction and (Trad) jazz. The second and most significant for this account, are the ways in which the Angries began to work through anti-technocratic ideas in their rejection of logical positivism.

Modes of Expression

Robert Hewison in *In Anger* (1981), the second book of his landmark trilogy on the cultural and social history of Britain from 1940–1970, devotes quite some space to an account of a group of new writers who had managed to free themselves from the bonds of the cultural and institutional power of the Oxbridge–London axis. Writers like Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Osborne and John Braine, whose novels of working- and lower middle-class male protagonists who tirade against

stifling moral, social and cultural orders, in both the style and content of their work are probably the first home-grown signs of a set of new modes of political dissent that would be taken up by a generation later in the 1960s (Daniels and Rycroft 1993). These new writers broke from the polite traditions of the Oxbridge–London axis, their works seemed inarticulate, used regional dialect and exploited a new appetite for a vivid representation of sex and violence. In this sense, the revolt of the Angries' contributed to a reformation in the expression of dissent, undermining conventional modes of expression through a subversion of language, but a different subversion to that practised by the Beats.

The roots of this new mode of expression and a wider cultural politics into which it can be situated, can be found in the major social and cultural shifts that affected Britain in the immediate post-war period. This was a group of writers who distrusted the moral order of the establishment at a time when the establishment itself appeared to be crumbling from within, shaken by events like the defection of the Soviet spies Burgess and Maclean (Hewison 1981: 94). The contradictions and absurdities of establishment literary and wider cultural values still found a voice in the 1950s, even though they were well past their use-by date. Paper rationing in the late 1940s and early 1950s meant that new writers were excluded. Publishing commitments needed to be fulfilled within existing resources and new magazines, the only forum for new talent, were rarely able to progress beyond the planning stages. It was the old guard of Apocalypse poets and neo-romantic writers of the 1930s that continued to be published. New and aspiring writers were then excluded from mainstream publishing and the only outlets for their work were local (often provincial) broadsheets and small magazines.

As post-war austerity eased, and a series of ruptures appeared in the fabric of the mandarin supremacy, new voices began to be heard. A group of poets, chiefly academics, collectively referred to as 'The Movement' began to challenge the cultural power of the Establishment. Stylistically, their emphasis was on 'post symbolism' and was anti-romantic, returning the genre of poetry to more disciplined techniques and formal style. The Movement strove for a more rationalist, clear style which did not, like the pre-war poets, rely on imagination as 'self evidently desirable', but held an esteem for 'clarity of meaning' (Morrison, 1980: 33). Many of these poets however, would later return to less formalist modes. Although conservative in nature, for which it would be criticised in the late 1950s, and certainly restrictive in scope of subject, the Movement did have interests in the more popular forms of art, like jazz and science fiction.

A similar commitment also drove the Angry Young Men, a branch of the Movement – the shared membership included John Wain and Kingsley Amis – into a more realist literary project. In general, their novels involved the picaresque adventures of a young provincial man who shunned traditional cultural values. Their tone was self-consciously middle-class and anti-intellectual. Although left-wing politically, the revolt of the Angries was largely artistic in nature. They took on board the Movement's rejection of the neo-romantics, promoting a more realist style of fiction writing. Whilst many writers were stamped with the Angry

Young Man label, most were quick to deny membership, or point out that the group was by no means a coherent whole. Most of the new breed of writers like the protagonists they portrayed, were male, provincial, lower-middle class in origin, grammar school educated and scholarship students at Oxbridge, usually having served time in the forces. Although their work has been seen as by no means experimental, it did open up the market for new subjects like working-class life, politics and sexual morality (Morrison 1980: 39). Heroes of Angry writing were in the Movement 'mould', '"tough", provincial, heterosexual, suspicious of pretension ... and resentful of class privilege' (Morrison 1980: 247).

Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger* (published in 1959) is perhaps the archetypal Angry protagonist in this vein. The dingy East Midlands bed-sit in which finds himself with his wife Alison and friend Cliff was not where the working-class Porter imagined higher education would lead. His fulminating bouts of anger are generally explained by the fact that the doors that he felt had opened for him and allowed him meritocratic progress remain guarded by an establishment in a society still ridden by class privilege. Alison, who by virtue of her class origins is cast as a representative of that establishment, is the target of much of Jimmy's often violent rage throughout the play. The anti-establishment tendencies of the hero of Kingsley Amis's novel *Lucky Jim* (1954) Jim Dixon takes a less vitriolic form than Jimmy Porter's, consisting mostly of face-pulling and furtive thoughts of aggression against his superiors' phoney principles, values and taste. Arthur Seaton, the hero of Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) on the other hand has not benefited from an emergent post-war meritocracy. A lathe operator in a bicycle factory in Nottingham he earns good money and has no qualms about spending it on alcohol, fashionable clothes and women. His anger and violence is less directed at establishment figures so much as anything or anyone who prevents him from doing as he pleases whether that be his shift manager, the neighbourhood matriarch, or the sergeant on army training programme. The very different stories of Dixon, Porter and Seaton do have commonalities – beyond anger. They each differently express an emergent form of cultural politics whether that is through the use of regional dialect in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Porter's obsession with playing jazz, or Dixon's loathing of the pretension of high art. Radical politics came to be defined as much through stylistics and aesthetics as through ideology. And this is where one of the key influences of the Angries upon later dissentient British groups lies.

Some argue, like Richard Hoggart at the time in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) that this new cultural politics arose from a nascent Americanisation of British culture after the Second World War. Certainly the *zeitgeist* of Britain and the United States were approaching a confluence, or at least a position of mutual inter-dependence in the 1950s. In the late 1950s the argument goes, an American myth of atomistic social mobility began to penetrate the British psyche and as such, the commodification of this myth in the form of culture and style, began in earnest. One can see this in new cultural formations such as the working class subculture of the Teddy Boys and in new socio-political formations. The rise of the new
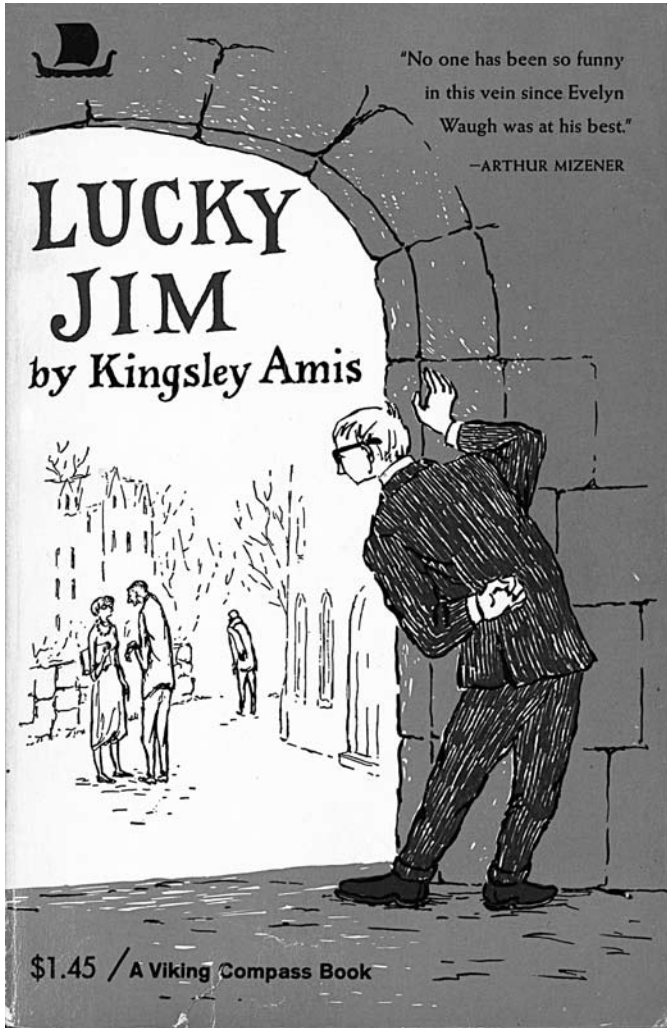
Figure 2.2   The 1958 Viking Compass edition of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*

meritocracy based on the welfare state and the Butler Education Act coupled with post-war austerity measures provided the 'cultural vacuum' into which American products and prevailing ideologies were drawn. Moreover, America's exporting power was backed-up with an ideological claim of moral superiority, giving a moral value to goods based on the American dream of individualism, meritocracy, mobility and progress. It is important not to dismiss this argument as simply another manifestation of the European left's anti-Americanism because there was a cultural

fascination with all things American in part as an outcome of the closer relations between the two countries forged during the war. But the American influence upon Britain was not a wholesale imposition nor was it entirely unmediated. So, whilst Arthur Seaton enjoys consuming new fashions – at one point in fact being likened to a Teddy Boy by his sergeant (Sillitoe 1989a: 160) – he is violently mistrustful of the new suburban lifestyles which were beginning to impact upon his area of Nottingham. Similarly the heroes of many other Angry stories like Dixon and Porter, were reluctant beneficiaries of a new meritocratic atmosphere, with the targets of their rage only coming into sight because of their social advancement.

The 1950s obsession with meritocratic progress is difficult to underestimate. An individual's potential came to be measured under the rational system of the IQ test with 'high I.Q. … established as the chief qualification for entry into the elite' (Young 1958: 70). As a result of the Butler Act, the state education system was reformed to enable those identified, usually at the age of 11, by an IQ test as worthy to progress through grammar schools at secondary level where they would be afforded the opportunities previously reserved for the children of the elite. This was and remains an exceedingly rationalised system, testing a particular form of intelligence which of course benefited a group of cultural producers like the Angries. Ironically it was also the system that is most closely associated with one of the targets of angry and especially countercultural revolt, technocracy.

Technocracy

Technocracy is a mode of government in which scientists and technical experts are in control and an organisational system in which those in power are selected on the basis of skill and qualification rather than by virtue of arbitrary privilege based upon birth or social acquaintance. Whilst a hypothetical situation, technocracy and technocratic control were nevertheless very current concerns in the 1950s: it seemed that the systematic organisation of the production line was being extended to all areas of life. For sure, with the establishment of a range of new instruments of governance associated with the welfare state and the associated expansion of the civil services, it would have seemed that human organisation was becoming increasingly complex and mechanised in the post-war period. Those in power tended to justify themselves by appeal to a regime of technical experts who in turn justified their leadership in an appeal to rationality and scientific forms of knowledge. Driven by a positivist agenda, technocracy eludes ideological categorisation, which rendered the political environment in which it served irrelevant. Technocratic society emerged as a product of accelerated industrialisation and not as an ideological tool; as such, it arose simultaneously in both East and West.

This notion of technocracy and especially its wide-ranging effect is best exemplified in Herbert Marcuse's conception of post-war society as 'one dimensional', as a functional system which structured actions *and* reality from within. One-dimensional society in Marcuse's terms was based on the ascendancy

and control of the rational and technological over the instinctual or natural, where the citizens or 'victims' become atrophied, mindless automatons attuned to the task of increasing productivity: 'the neutrality of technological rationality shows forth over and above politics ... as spurious ... it serves the politics of domination' (Marcuse 1991: 80). Writing in the late 1950s, long before he developed a more optimistic outlook as a result of his engagement with factions of the American West Coast counterculture, Marcuse saw no possibilities for the 'one-dimensional man' to escape this subjugation. One-dimensional society was a deeply penetrating controlling force operating through advertising and the mass-media. It was a ubiquitous project operating at all levels of consciousness and was reinforced by the structuring of language and communication themselves. The one-dimensional world had become the stuff of 'total administration', absorbing even the administrators: 'The web of domination has become the web of Reason itself' (Marcuse 1991: 169), any transcendent project seemed to fail because it transcended rationality. Such repression prescribed all individual activity. Even thought and sexuality could be scientifically controlled and organised so that 'the logic of thought' remained the 'logic of domination' (Marcuse 1991: 138, see Chapter 6).

The perception then was of a future scenario of total technocratic domination that penetrated deep into consciousness, controlled language and communication, and in which the transcendent ends of life were made to appear irrational. More conventional forms of political activity and communication were by definition also technocratic regardless of their radical credentials because they replicated the same rational semiotic structure as the ruling order. And it was this perception that drove some post-war cultural producers to develop new aesthetic strategies and new modes of expression that might transcend technocratic control. For some then there was an explicit aesthetic effort to constitute what was for Marcuse (at least in the 1950s) an impossibility – a 'Great Refusal'. The writings and musings of the Angry Young Men was one, albeit unspectacular, example of this experimentation.

It has become common to conflate technocracy with science and technology especially since the post-war meritocratic citizen was the product of a project to humanise new technologies. However it is important to hold them apart when looking at the 1950s and 1960s because anti-technocrats were rarely technophobes. We have seen this with the Beat Generation and it is in the realist aesthetics of Angry writing that this important distinction is best evidenced.

Logical Positivism and the Angries

In what is widely regarded as their manifesto, *Declaration* (1957), those labelled Angry Young Men by the literary establishment (one of whom in fact a woman, Doris Lessing) outlined their aesthetic and political outlook. *Declaration* edited by publisher Tom Maschler and amateur philosopher Colin Wilson and including contributions from Kingsley Amis, Kenneth Tynan, Lindsay Anderson and John

Osborne, focuses upon a number of social, cultural and philosophical issues of concern. Whilst by no means of one voice or indeed coherent in their musings on existentialism, realism, stoicism, romanticism, and even technocracy and logical positivism, there were areas of agreement over the nature of the Angry brand of realism. This was not an aesthetic that venerated the kinds of harmonious eighteenth-century ideals that were influencing post-war modernist architects and planning and were indeed reshaping the provincial towns and cities about which many Angries wrote. Rather, Angry realism partially embraced the literature and culture of the nineteenth century and industrialism and drew upon the social revolution emerging from mechanisation which provided the (non-work) time and space to 'ponder the problems of meaning and purpose' (Wilson 1957: 33).

The pondering for the contributors to *Declaration* reflected upon a gritty realism, grounded in everyday experience and directed towards an art with a self-evident aesthetic, that is one in which meaning was not hidden beneath the emperor's clothes of pompous symbolism. Angry realism was an art which sprang from a belief that the power of life itself absorbed symbolic intent. As such, the realist novel was the 'highest form of prose writing; higher than, and out of reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism or any other ism' (Lessing 1957: 14). The commitment of the realist aesthetic lay in its belief in the integrity of "man" as an individual, and 'one cannot be committed without belief' (Lessing 1957: 15). This was a reaction against twentieth-century literatures' glorification of the 'lostness', 'smallness' and 'impotence' of 'men under adverse conditions' (Hopkins 1957: 137). Art was the 'affair of the common man' and the 'whole man cannot respond to anything that has not been lived out'. But such a focus did not imply a loss of allegoric intent. Real life was often 'notoriously violent in its changes', 'always mingling with the grotesquely comic, with the sombre or even tragic' (Wain 1957: 101–104). The first task was to make the individual aware of their situation, to 'awaken them to their reality' (Holroyd 1957: 202). In this drive to awaken readers to the new environment evolving around them with a self-evident style, the Angry aesthetic shared a motivation with other not obviously related movements of the late 1950s such as the Independent Group (see Chapter 3).

Despite the emphasis on the mundane and the quotidian in their work, there was a discernable spiritual dimension to Angry realism. One of the key themes in *Declaration* is the rejection of logical positivism, which was worked through in greater detail by the more marginal Angries Colin Wilson and Stuart Holroyd. Logical positivism originated in Germany and Austria in the 1920s. Positivist theoreticians were not only engaged with new mathematical theorems and scientific discoveries of current concern such as Einstein's theory of relativity or Kurt Godel's incompleteness theorems, they were also engaged in politics and aesthetics. They were 'actively involved with the revolutionary socio-cultural and political struggles of the period and, in particular, with the movement for a *neue Sachlichkeit* [new objectivity] in both society and the arts typified by the Dessau Bauhaus …The logical positivist movement was not only identified with Einsteinian physics and

modern abstract mathematics, but also with socialism, internationalism, and "red Vienna"' (Friedman 1999: xi). The philosophy was popularised in Britain through the diaspora of logical positivists forced to flee Germany and Austria after 1933 and by high profile philosophers such as A.J. Ayer.

For Angries like Wilson and Holroyd then, logical positivism in its political and aesthetic form was the rationalist philosophy which was not only emblematic of technocracy, but tended to narrow down the areas about which it was safe to speculate: questions outside these areas had to be resolved on rigidly practical grounds. Politics for instance could be considered in terms of a series of empirical and not moral choices (Hewison 1981: 50–51). Wilson and Holroyd, in their rejection of logical positivism as both philosophy and practise offered a spiritual alternative in the form of their counter-philosophy, Religious Existentialism.

In *The Outsider* (1956), Wilson delineated a holistic alternative to logical positivism by identifying a number of artistic Outsiders – Van Gogh, Camus, Nietzsche, D.H. Lawrence and Hemingway. The Outsider was not 'concerned with distinctions between body and spirit, or man and nature; these produce theological thinking and philosophy; he rejects both' (Wilson 1978: 37). For Wilson, the death of true philosophy – that which concerns the 'relation of God to Man' – occurred four centuries ago with the birth of humanism. Technocracy worked to make rational something which was inherently 'savage', 'unorganised' and 'irrational'. All of the 'dangerous unnamable impulses' of every human being are subjugated and made to look 'civilised' in religion and philosophy (Wilson 1978: 23). It was this fracture between the spiritual and the physical embodied in logical positivism which also concerned Stuart Holroyd. Talking of freedom on the political level was the 'mistake of the century ... freedom is an inner condition' and could not exist in the community if it did not exist in the individual. Freedom could not be imposed from above, but characterised the 'religious man' in a 'Will to freedom' (Holroyd 1957: 181). Humanist culture and its legacy of attitudes and ideas was 'quite incompatible with the religious attitude'. What 'modern man' required was 'self knowledge', to know that 'he himself is determined eternally as well as temporally, in relation to transcendence as well as in relation to the world'. The necessary precondition to self knowledge was a state of 'wakefulness', aware of the reality of the world (Holroyd 1957: 184–188). In this realist aesthetic, it was in action and creativity, an interaction with the tangible, that 'man' 'transcends himself as a creature' (Holroyd 1957: 199). Free will could only operate when there was a motive, but motive was a matter of belief, and it followed that 'belief must mean the belief in the existence of something, that is to say, it concerns what is real. So, ultimately, freedom depends on the real' (Wilson 1978: 49). The artist had to become actively involved in 'restoring a metaphysical consciousness to our age' (Wilson 1957: 53).

Logical positivism worked to make the world seem unreal, so obviating freedom. The position of The Outsider contained a clear subterranean awareness, the irrational world was never understood, but was rationalised through being withdrawn and looking inwards to the self, in an attempt to 'understand the human soul and its workings' (Wilson 1978: 214): The way of 'alienation points outwards

towards abstraction, the way of mysticism points inward, towards the concrete' or real (Wilson 1978: 288). This was an instinctive desire, difficult to articulate because it was not always possible to tell what your instincts were driving towards (Wilson 1978: 235). In short, this withdrawal was an attempt to escape from triviality forever and 'be "possessed" by a Will to Power, to more life' (Wilson 1978: 214).

Given the political implications of Wilson's Religious Existentialism it is not surprising that many Angries were quick to deny any association with his aesthetic. There was more than a 'sniff of fascism about the outlook of the Outsiders [and this included the Angry Young Man] – the disinterest in the gentle and the warm things of human life, their contempt for compassion, their dismissal of social reform as effete sentimentality, and their salivating reflex at the glimpse of approaching power' (Allsop 1985: 23). Outsiders ignored the rational as it was enshrined in democracy, and Kenneth Allsop in *The Angry Decade* (1958), warned of the bloody consequences if the 'romantic reactionaries of radicalism', the 'bleeding hearts who wanted everyone to "feel" not think their way out of troubles', were to have their way (Allsop 1985: 126–127). For Allsop, the new writers depicted rebels without cause, without caring about the causes: 'In this technologically triumphant age, when rockets begin to scream up towards the moon but the human mind seems at an even greater distance, anger has a limited use. Love has a wider application' (Allsop 1985: 208).

Conclusions and Connections

It is quite easy to criticise Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*, not least because it was drafted in complicated circumstances, from a tent on Hampstead Heath using many inaccurately recalled and wrongly attributed quotes and ideas, and with a rather convoluted and very public dispute with his high profile father-in-law to be. However, it is worth drawing out some themes here to help connect to other contemporaneous aesthetics and to happenings later in the 1960s. The first is the notion of a self-evident aesthetic, one that plugs directly into the consumer and which has largely existential meaning – that is a meaning derived from the direct connections between the everyday experiences of the reader and the content of text. The rejection, or indeed extreme caricaturing of logical positivism is not central to this aesthetic characteristic. Indeed pop artists in the Independent Group such as Richard Hamilton, were fascinated adherents of logical positivism (and A.J. Ayer was at one time a participant in the group's events) (Moffat 2000) and attempted to produce an art as we shall see later, whose form and style was intended to be immediately self evident to the non-connoisseur.

The second is the drive in the Angry realist aesthetic to encourage a 'wakefulness' in the reader, to make them aware of their reality. It is difficult to find an avant-garde cultural movement from the 1950s and 1960s that did not have the same intention. Some Op Artists for instance would deny the tag of abstract artists precisely because the intention was that their art should spill out of the gallery and affect everyday

awareness. This aesthetic drive was directly addressing a new post-war environment characterised by change and lack of fixity.

The third theme is that of a kind of geographical imagination involving an emergent conception of nature that is evident in the Angries work. Both Wilson and Holroyd insist on the natural state of 'man' of 'man' as a natural, instinctual and 'savage' being. This is no longer a romantic understanding of nature, but one informed by scientific and theoretical advance. Indeed Colin Wilson's rhetoric was constructed around science, efficiency, meritocracy and the exploration of new frontiers. The contemplative life became more tangible with mechanisation and increased leisure time in which people began to 'ponder the problems of meaning and purpose' (Wilson 1957: 33). Writers like Alan Sillitoe, most famous for his creation of the growling protagonist of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* Arthur Seaton, worked with this theme. For Sillitoe, there are two types of geographical imagination, or ways in which geographical knowledge is obtained and his characters tended to be formed by one or the other imagination. The first is highly sensate, relying on intuition and instinct, the second is more formally structured and requires rational frames of reference like maps. He has explained this dichotomy by using Matthew Arnold's essay 'Hellenism and Hebraism' from *Culture and Anarchy*, (Sillitoe 1989b: 10; 1987: 7). Both categories are concerned with accruing geographical knowledge and involve moral, spiritual and existential choices. Hellenism is concerned with a lack of knowledge, of intelligence and instinct and what is best, ultimately for the traveller in gathering knowledge. Hebraism appeals to laws, rationality, conscience and more importantly, moral behaviour. The 'governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience' (Arnold 1965: 165). For Sillitoe, any city with a maze of streets will produce characters like Arthur Seaton, who have 'a sense of direction, ingenuity, initiative [and who] live on [their] wits'. In Sillitoe's work then we see worked out the tensions between a positivist and non-positivist perspective.

In setting up 1950s Angry writing as a precursor to the radical cultural politics that emerged in Britain and throughout the West in the 1960s I would not want to ignore the essentially conservative and reactionary nature of some Angry writing. And even though the Beat Generation might be considered more acceptably radical they too were deeply conservative around for instance gender issues. In covering both literary movements, the intention has been to emphasise that the vision enacted by London's counterculture later in the 1960s was circulating in a different form and expressed slightly differently in the 1950s. We will see in the next chapter too that at the same time that vision was set to work by others working in quite different fields.

Chapter 3

The Long Front of Material and Immaterial Culture II: Architecture and Visual Culture

> A new streetscape as well as a new skyline was shaping. Everywhere one looked
> the new architectural language, patently a language as universal as blue jeans
> and the juke-box and ballistic missiles, asserted its idiom, stark and strong, over
> the time-honoured observances of cornice and moulding, pediment and column.
> (Hopkins 1964: 459)

In this, the second of two chapters exploring the aesthetic and stylistic precursors
to Swinging London I want to focus on visual culture in its very broadest sense.
Themes just developed around Angry writing and Beat culture will remerge here
but it rather different contexts. Here, we are now in London not the provinces or
virtual transatlantic space, and one of my intentions is to demonstrate that other
modes of expression were working along similar lines and from similar fundamental
principles. In this chapter, two apparently disparate projects are detailed: the 1951
Festival of Britain, and developments in the visual arts especially Pop and Op Art
during the 1950s and early 1960s. The former is of course easily associated with
the hegemonic project of post-war reconstruction and modernisation and the latter
is self-consciously and self-evidently counter-hegemonic. Here though I want to
argue that both 'swing', both were 'pop', and both share a vision.

Modernity and the Soft City

That post-war London, swinging or otherwise, was a projection of modernity is
difficult to dispute. It was after all the product of reconstruction, if not a showpiece
of the national reconstruction effort. Our understanding of twentieth-century
modernity has been recently enhanced by a number of scholars.

The work geographer David Matless and others has established a nuanced
understanding of the geographies of twentieth-century Modernity which stresses
the more subtle and contingent manner in which city, citizenship and social order
were refigured through modernity. This version of modernism plays down the
universalising and ubiquitous characteristics in terms of the palpable outcomes
of modernisation and pays greater attention to the role played by situated cultures
and located traditions. We find for instance the universal modernist understandings
of the relations between nature and humanity played out differently dependent
upon the locale. In part, this more complex understanding has been driven by an
interrogation of the connections between planning and design and a re-visioned

natural order especially in the inter-war period (see for example Matless 1998). Inter-war modernity was inflected by a vision of the systematic interconnectedness of nature and humanity that saw, after Darwin, functional linkages between humans as organisms and their environment. This re-visioned comprehension of nature was also present in post-war London, albeit in an evolved state that also took into account theoretical advances in the comprehension of matter, time and space.

Swinging London then formed in a discursive environment that was characterised by a vision of a newly understood cosmic nature. That vision permeates projects that one might consider hegemonic, or at least orchestrated by the powerful, such as the Festival of Britain, and more subversive projects such as those developed in Pop and Op Art, and those emerging from London's counterculture in the second half of the 1960s. Discourse, immaterial as it might be, is clearly implicated in the development and character of post-war London. Whilst the physical changes in the city should not be ignored, these alterations to the hardware are probably less significant than the changes in the software. Swinging London was as much if not more immaterial as it was material.

That discursive characteristic is very much evident in Jonathan Raban's *Soft City* (1974) which maps not so much the physical trauma arising from upheavals in post-war urban morphology as the profound shifts in the contours of citizenship and identity. The 'soft city' is the stage upon which identities can be played out, but the stage itself is plastic and moulds itself to identities and images as they emerge and change. In this observation Raban was echoing though not explicitly acknowledging the popular accounts of Swinging London in magazines, movies and music that predate his book. Indeed Raban captures something of the process that created Swinging London in *Soft City* albeit that it is ostensibly a story of North London gentrification. What *Soft City* underlines is that the profound shifts in post war London did not mark themselves out so much in the physical landscape. Whilst there were physical and morphological upheavals in London during the 1960s by far the most significant shifts were not material but discursive. The soft city awaited the 'imprint of identity' from human occupancy: 'Decide who you are, and the city will … assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is and your identity will be revealed, like a position on a map fixed by triangulation' (Raban 1974: 1–2). The burgeoning middle classes Raban observed were preoccupied with discourse and their discursive currency were the new theories of society, nature and technology popularised by fêted intellectuals such as Herbert Marcuse and Marshall McLuhan: 'In this sense, it seems to me that living in the city is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relation between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living' (Raban 1974: 1–2). The most clear and earliest articulation of that aesthetic vocabulary employed to describe the evolving relationship between humans and material is the 1951 Festival of Britain.

The Festival of Britain: Pomp, Pop and Technoscience

> Grey, battered old London was beginning to preen herself again. In St. James's Park, the newly painted stucco of Nash's Carlton House Terrace shone white through the trees. And office workers, pouring each morning over Waterloo Bridge, paused – as they had from time to time since the new river wall was started in 1949 – to watch, rising over the South Bank, the curious skeletal shapes of what it was explained, was to be a national gesture of faith in the future, a 'Festival of Britain'. (Hopkins 1964: 269)

The 1951 Festival of Britain is a useful point from which to begin tracing some of the origins of Swinging London. The Festival might have been an exercise in reconstruction and nation (re)building and so somewhat distant from the frivolous and carefree image of the swinging city, but it was also a stage for the display of

Figure 3.1   The 1951 Science Exhibition catalogue
Source: © HMSO.

new ideas about nature, matter and form, ideas that found expression in cultural forms and formations more closely associated with the swinging image. Aspects of the Festival provided a model of how these new visions could be communicated and set to work reshaping discursive and palpable environments. The adventurous architecture and design showcased at the Festival embodied a set of new understandings of nature and the cosmos which would later also find expression in literature as we have seen, in new developments in the visual arts, in fashion and in the cultural politics of the counterculture later in the 1960s.

It would be easy to presume that the Festival of Britain, as an exercise in national celebration whose main site on the South Bank of the Thames in the heart of the nation's capital, was somewhat forthright and definite about Britishness and British national identity. However, this was certainly not the case. On the South Bank site, the themed exhibition section, 'The People' meandered through the history and contemporary scene, tracing the evolution of Britishness. Jaquetta Hawkes's section 'The People of Britain' assessed the mix of races which shaped such 'a rare miscellany of faces as confronts the visitor in any London bus' (Cox 1951: 63) and how that racial variety was impacting upon the evolution of national landscapes. Britishness was even more vaguely portrayed in 'The Lion and the Unicorn' exhibit which was charged with displaying the 'British People's native genius' and the exceptional and indescribable qualities comprising the British character (Cox 1951: 67–68). There, only a few clues in language and literature, in a characteristic eccentricity, in craftsmanship and in libertarian instinct were discerned. As one would expect, the English language was portrayed through expositions of the Bible and Shakespeare, with craftsmanship through the ages encompassing classic furniture design and culminating in the latest Rolls Royce jet engine. But the narrative of progress inherent in both of these displays was instantly deconstructed when entering the eccentric's corner which featured Lewis Carroll's White Knight and a series of machines 'for bizarre purposes and models made of unlikely materials' (Leventhal 1995: 451). Even the official guidebook had to admit that on leaving the Pavilion the 'visitor from overseas concludes that he is not much wiser about the British National character, it might console him to know that the British people themselves are still very much in the dark about it' (Cox 1951: 67–68).

This confusion of message and unstable narrative is quite understandable. What it should mean to be British and Britain's imagination of itself and of the rest of the world were no longer widely believed facts that could be projected upon its citizens. The geographical imagination of Britain was now shaped by new influences: from across the Atlantic where connections with the United States had been significantly strengthened through the war effort and the post-war Marshall Plan; by the emergence of a new Europe; and by the denudation of long-held colonial territory. For Roy Strong the latter was the significant driving force: the 'organizers, shorn of the magic of Empire, attempted to reconstitute a future based on a new secular mythology' (Strong 1976: 8). But it is in the end, quite difficult to disentangle them. Each of these profound shifts in the geopolitical landscape served

to undermine long-established truths of Britishness and of the literal centrality of the British way of life. Add to this geopolitical insecurity the institution of a welfare state by the nation's first socialist government along with an identifiable national cultural shift – characterised by some as a crisis of hegemony (see Clarke et al 1975, Hebdige 1979) – then an exhibition with no singular narrative meaning or interpretation, where meanings arose in the interaction between observer and observed is an unsurprising outcome. In a sense then the Festival was Pop Art on a grand scale, a disassembled, cut-up and reassembled collage of the nation's past, present and future. And, like the Pop Art experience, the visitor would recognise familiar elements from their everyday environment placed in unfamiliar contexts and so derive new perspectives and meanings from the experience.

But the Festival of Britain was initially intended as anything but pop. It was envisaged as a grander and far more pompous affair marking the centenary of its 1851 counterpart at Crystal Palace, and was charged with attempting to allow the nation to regroup after the war, to postulate a new international position for the nation. Touring exhibits travelled throughout the provinces, and towns and villages across the country funded and established their own Festival projects. Glasgow and Belfast had official Festival exhibits and within London itself a science exhibition at the Science Museum (see Figure 3.1), the new Festival Gardens in Battersea (see Figure 3.2) and an influential architectural exhibit in Poplar showcasing the latest public housing design, formed significant aspects of the Festival. Despite these other projects, there is little contention amongst scholars of the 1951 Festival that London and the South Bank in particular was the centre of activities. The South Bank was then the centre of a constellation of sights and sounds across Britain which amassed to create 'one united act of national reassessment and one corporate re-affirmation of faith in the nation's future' (Festival of Britain catalogue 1951: 11).

On display at the South Bank were the very latest and most modern of Britain's design, manufacture, thought and artistic expression, demonstrating the British contribution to global civilisation 'in the arts of peace' (Cox 1951: 8), in mapping the globe, charting the heavens and investigating the nature and structure of the universe. Whilst a much smaller sample of these advances was on tour by sea and by land across the country, London was very much at the heart of the Festival's exhibition. The narrative was progressive and logical consisting simply of the past through the present and envisioning the future, with the accompanying ethos that 'what you can see you can believe' (Cox 1951: 9). This was a common aesthetic trope during the 1950s as we saw in Chapter 2 with Angry writing, a realist aesthetic of the self-evident where meanings are clear, apparent and singular, and one that can be found in many modes of cultural production. But, as the eccentric's corner of the Lion and the Unicorn exhibit suggest, this need not imply that the aesthetic strategy had the intended outcome or that the narrative was not the subject of interpretation or disruption. 'Progress' past and future was, the exhibition inferred, predicated largely upon two founding factors: the 'Land of Britain' and the 'People of Britain' – the main exhibition themes.

However, despite all of the exhibits on display, the narrative of the future – at least the near and tangible future – was largely expressed in the design and layout of the South Bank complex. Most of what we now know as the 'South Bank' today is reclaimed marshland. The South Bank site reclaimed four and a half acres of land from the marshy fringes of the Thames 'so long abandoned by human enterprise and so newly won from the river' (Cox 1951: 7). This endeavour was testament to a new spirit of resourcefulness, experimentation and efficient land utilisation carried through from various inter-war campaigns around planning and geographical education (Cosgrove and Rycroft 1995). These campaigns set both the aesthetic, utilitarian and to a certain extent the economic trajectories of reconstruction plans into which the South Bank complex can be positioned. In these, an equation of form and function operated were there was no necessary contradiction between aesthetic appeal and socio-economic efficiency. In the case of the South Bank, aesthetically displeasing nature was reclaimed to provide a space for a functional culture. But this did not imply that, architecturally at least, a 'festival style' emerged. Whilst architectural critic Reyner Banham did indeed identify a Festival style – a post-war hybrid style that polluted the notion of 'pure architecture' (Shonfield 1998) – this was just the intention, there was no singular architectural aesthetic. As the architectural director of the South Bank site, Hugh Casson stated, the mid-twentieth century was more sceptical than the Victorians who had visited the 1851 Crystal Palace: 'One mistake we should not make, we should not fall into the error of supposing we were going to produce anything conclusive …'(quoted in Gardiner 1999: 51). Indeed it is probably precisely that scepticism that drove Reyner Banham to characterise the outcome as hybrid.

Twenty architects were engaged to construct a vision of British experiment and adventure in buildings of the South Bank. The Festival Hall however represented the only permanent building, although it was soon followed by other equally adventurous but aesthetically divergent additions such as the National Theatre. Much of the exhibition was housed in the Dome of Discovery and it, along with almost all of the exhibition pavilions and spaces, was swiftly demolished. The incoming Conservative government led by a resurgent Winston Churchill needed no reminders of the success of the Labour government even though the Festival organisers had claimed to have taken care not to include any party political or ideological dimensions to the exhibition (see Gardiner 1999). Other than the Festival Hall, what remained on the South Bank though was a sense that the space supported the avant-garde, adventure, innovation and novelty, not just in architecture but in all forms of cultural expression. This space, thanks to the 1951 Festival, became a tangible expression of meritocracy and the emergence of a new establishment (Booker 1970: 216).

While the elements of new design and construction techniques showcased in the Festival were clearly influential and adventurous, the related and subtle redefinitions of citizenship implicit to them and the exhibition were equally profound. By capturing a mythical notion of meritocracy and geographically situating it in the heart of a contracting Empire, the Festival was able to realign

notions of Britishness and project both a Modernist and a Modish geography. The primary motivation for the Festival according to its director Gerard Barry, was that it be 'popular' and for everyone, and in that apparently neutral and inclusive motivation lay the Festival's real ideology: that it engender the same principles of egalitarian reform that drove the Labour government's post-war social and economic programmes (Burstow 1996: 5). Statements made by Barry during the years prior to the Festival are notable for their similarity to popular descriptions of London some 15 years after the Festival. The Festival should be he said in 1948, 'a year of fun, fantasy, and colour, a year in which we can, while soberly surveying our great past and our promising future, for once let ourselves go'. And in 1951 when the Festival opened: 'The whole thing is a triumph over austerity, glumness, utility, it's-patriotic-to-be-dowdy and all the rest of the dreary cant which has
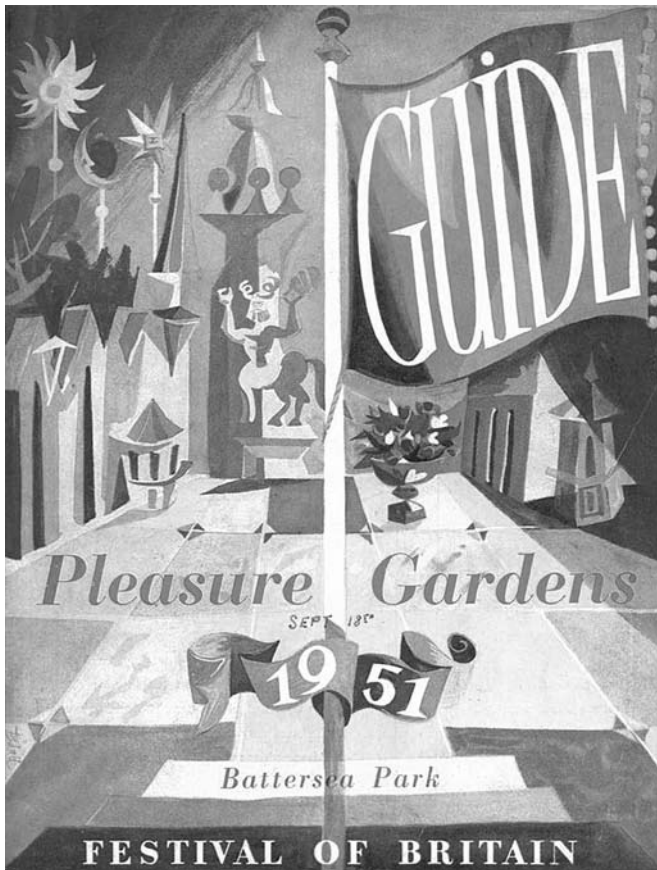

Figure 3.2   The pop-like guide to the Festival gardens at Battersea Park
Source: © HMSO.

saddened our lives these many years … It is heady and sparkling' (Gerard Barry quoted in Leventhal 1995: 453). In attitude at least London would appear to begin to swing on the South Bank in 1951, long before the end of rationing and some 15 years before its time. As Harry Hopkins notes in his landmark social history of post war Britain *The New Look*, prior to the Festival, Britain was a land of 'gravy browns and dull greens', not the primary colours that punctuated the architecture and design on display. Britain, one reporter noted in her review of the experience, had emerged from a long grey winter 'this galaxy of colour was like a glass of champagne. Everywhere I looked brought fresh impact – vivid reds, blues, greens, lemon yellows – bubbles pricking my nose' (Hopkins 1964: 271–272).

Such pop sensibilities and light heartedness, whilst suggesting that we can legitimately consider the Festival of Britain a precursor to the swinging city, should not be confused with a lack of depth or earnest intent – a mistake often made when considering pop aesthetics in general. Implicit and sometimes explicit to the Festival project was a vision of the post-war British meritocratic citizen. The meritocratic citizen of the second half of the twentieth century that was both proposed and nurtured by the Festival would be aware of his or her ability to advance beyond their social position. Whilst that social mobility would be based both upon equitable access to the nation's resources, heralded in the birth of the welfare state, it was also based upon a prescribed way of engaging with those resources that drew upon new visions of nature. Here, the influence of inter-war planners, architects and educationalists was important. They had in part focused upon an environmental 'education' which stressed the need to re-engage an intimate connection between society and nature that had arisen from a national concern dating from the late nineteenth century for degenerating urban populations. That degeneration, it was believed, stemmed from an organic divorce from nature and its processes. At the root of these concerns then lay a notion of geographical citizenship that mediated people–environment relationships through a variety of codes of conduct and behaviours. The inter-war period witnessed a range of initiatives directed towards facilitating this reconnection between nature and society, or planning to ensure that a disconnection did not occur. These initiatives shared an aesthetic philosophy that harmonised human and environment that would, it was believed, result in a closer fit between social and natural forms and functions. This philosophy is identifiable in the narrative, layout and aesthetics of the Festival and is a keystone upon which other reconstruction projects built. It informs architecture and planning, and not just avant-garde architecture and planning throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The significant difference in the post-war period to that of the inter-war period however, is the way in which nature was differently understood.

Whilst mid twentieth-century modernist architecture and planning might appear to be concretised and thoroughly unnatural, separating the human from the natural and celebrating technical triumph and higher consciousness above lower orders, much modernist design took natural elements as basic building blocks. There are identifiable elemental components, shapes and relationships

in modernist aesthetics. These natural phenomena were evidenced in society's expanding field of vision during the twentieth century, from the microscopic to the macroscopic worlds; atoms and cells to solar systems and galaxies. Twentieth-century modernist design betrayed not only then a vision of a particular type of social order, but grounded that social order in conceptual relationships with the natural. For the influential architectural historian and critic Sigfried Giedion, the mid twentieth century in particular was a moment in which previous conceptions of matter, nature and energy that had underpinned design needed to be replaced and recast in a new aesthetic because 'no earlier period has penetrated so deeply and with such giant strides into the basic elements of life, matter, energy, growth and the limits of the organic and the inorganic' (Giedion 1956: 93). Aesthetics now had to take account of elemental and proportional rules that were not simply mathematical concepts, but derived from new conceptions of time and space.

These new understandings were based upon universal visions and were in the minds of those charged with designing the second half of the twentieth century in Britain and inform London's reconstruction plans. Art, industry and science were urged to cooperate in the formulation of new visions, drawing specifically upon the 'newly emerged aspect of nature, hitherto invisible but now revealed by science and technology … new vistas of nature which have hardly yet reached our sensibilities' (Kepes 1956: 17). There were certain continuous and elemental form-patterns in nature which had to be brought to the senses:

> Seen together, aerial maps of river estuaries and road systems, feathers, fern leaves, branching blood vessels, nerve ganglia, electron micrographs of crystals and the tree like patterns of electrical discharge-figures are connected, although they are different in place, origin and scale. Their similarity of form is by no means accidental. As patterns of energy-gathering and energy distribution, they are similar graphs generated by similar processes. (Arp 1956: 260)

The project of some influential modernist architecture and planning was to re-present this modular form, the harmonies of form and function in nature reflecting equally in a harmonious social order at one with its new environment. Through architecture, planning, design and environmental education we were to be familiarised with the forms, components and processes identified in new vistas of nature: 'We need to map the world's new configurations with our senses, dispose our own activities and movements in conformity with its rhythms and discover in it potentialities for a richer, more orderly and secure human life' (Kepes 1956: 19).

What was being called for then were ways of bringing to the human scale and human senses discoveries in physics which were uncovering new aspects of the infinitely large and the infinitely small. Whist it is certainly true that at least some small portion of this effort was motivated by a need to rehabilitate the atom and nuclear physics following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was also a genuine educative desire. Indeed, during the immediate post-war period

science and its perspectives were promoted as both useful and quotidian (see for example Hornsey 2008). The Festival celebrations for instance were also geared to imparting developments in modern physics to the public with features on the atom in both the Special Exhibition held in the science museum in Kensington and a section in the Dome of Discovery. These displays were the latest in a series of exhibitions described by Sophie Forgan (2003) beginning in 1946 that attempted to familiarise the general public with atomic structures and the nature of the atom. Like the Lion and the Unicorn Exhibition on the South Bank, at the Special Exhibition use was made of Lewis Carroll. In this case Alice's Adventures in Wonderland were deployed as a structuring metaphor:

> Entry to the exhibition will be through a series of chambers in which ordinary objects are successively magnified until the spectator, narrowing on a single crystal, can see the atoms which compose it. Like Alice, nibbling her magic toadstool, he will be able to grow smaller at will and finally, at a magnification of ten thousand million times, to wander through a Wonderland in which the nucleus of the atom and its surrounding electrons are spread all around him. (Festival press release quoted in Forgan 2003: 181)

Back on the South Bank in Battersea's Festival Gardens were other examples of atomic structure in the shape of Edward Miller's Abacus Screen. In addition to exhibits available for public viewing were more mundane and everyday representations of the atom. The Council of Industrial Design had established a Festival Pattern Group two years prior to the Festival that was charged with creating new decorative designs for fabrics, furnishings and ceramics that would be based upon crystal structures and stylised representations of atoms and molecules.

Current technoscientific advances were then a part of art and everyday environments in the 1960s. As Barbara Hepworth who was a commissioned sculptor for the Festival of Britain noted, art 'reflects the laws and the evolution of the universe – both in the power and the rhythm of growth and structure as well as the infinitude of ideas which reveal themselves when one is in accord with the cosmos and the personality is the free to develop'. The pop and even swinging sensibilities of the London happenings of the Festival were punctuated by models and representations of these new vistas of nature. The modern citizen envisaged by these displays was to literally embody these new technoscientific views of a newly conceived cosmic nature and reshape themselves in the light of them. As Raban observed, albeit with a slightly different intent, the relationship between 'man and material' really was reworked in London. The new vocabulary of art and style which expressed this reworking is especially clear in two post-war art movements closely associated with the city, Pop Art and Op Art.

Pop, Op and Swinging Aesthetics

> Vision is the fundamental factor in human insight … our most important resource
> for shaping our physical, spatial environment and grasping the new aspect of
> nature revealed by modern science … artists are living seismographs who can
> pick up on, map out and display the 'sensuous qualities of the world'. (Kepes
> 1965: 121)

I have drawn out some of the more pop sensibilities in the nature of Festival
architecture and design but as yet not really worked through what the Pop aesthetic
might be. In the second half of the chapter then, I want to explore some of the
visual aesthetic roots of Swinging London by working through aspects of British
Pop Art. Pop Art is generally regarded as one of the most significant influences
on the swinging style but I also want to take some time to cover a related artistic
genre to which most accounts of Swinging London only pay lip service, Op Art.
An exploration of Op Art helps to not only redress that imbalance in accounts of
the swinging style, but also enables both a more explicit connection to happenings
later in the 1960s in London with respect to countercultural activities, and a link
back to aspects of architectural and design aesthetics covered in the first half of
the chapter. Both of those connections revolve around a similar understanding of
cosmic nature. Whilst Pop Art also employed these new understandings of nature
and the cosmos, Op Art and Op Artists were more explicit in their articulation.

Pop Art

It is widely accepted that the Pop Art movement was a major aesthetic antecedent
to Swinging London. As a largely London based phenomenon in Britain, Pop
Art, by dissolving accepted rigidities in the conception of culture, moralism taste
and manners, was able to 'set a style for the spectacle of Kings Road' (Hewison
1986: xiv). Pop Art was defined by one of the most notable British artists Richard
Hamilton in 1957 in a letter to the Independent Group as 'Popular (designed for
a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily-forgotten),
Low Cost, Mass Produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky,
Glamorous, Big business' (Hamilton 1982: 28). And whilst that list does sum up
the subjects, objects and purpose of Pop Art quite well, when defining the aesthetic
it is also important to note the all-encompassing, inclusive and expansive vision
of culture entailed in Pop: 'It included the entire nexus of social connections and
communication by putting on display a generalised field of culture where high and
low were no longer opposed but parts of a larger social continuum' (Kaizen 2000:
114). The art critic Lawrence Alloway who is credited with coining the phrase Pop
Art in a piece that appeared in the journal *Architectural Design* early in 1958, as I
have already noted, captured this expansive and inclusive notion of culture in the
phrase 'the long front of culture'.

Pop Art is recognisable because it takes its content and often its materials from what is widely known. Artists incorporated images and shapes from popular culture in innovative genres of painting and sculpture that in both style and content were directed towards the contemporary world. In developing new representational practices Pop Artists were attempting to find a mode of expression that could articulate their experiences of post-war Britain which was a substantially different and fast changing place with a burgeoning consumer culture and improved affluence. Pop Art drew on a radical heritage that encompassed Dada and the surrealists. As such, whilst it might appear that it is a celebration of commercialism and the burgeoning consumer culture of the 1950s, the celebration was both ironic and self-conscious.

The story of the origins of British Pop Art is the story of two London institutions, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and the Independent Group. The ICA was the meeting place for 'young avant-garde coalitions' and the Independent Group was one such coalition. The Independent Group was established in London in 1952 but its membership were not exclusively practicing artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, but also critics like Alloway and architects like Alison and Peter Smithson (Sadler 2003). Very much the interdisciplinary discussion group, the topics of discussion at Independent Group meetings were wide ranging and apart from aspects of innovation in artistic representation they mapped out new aspects of the post-war environment: nuclear physics, cybernetics, car body design, machine aesthetics, the mass media, advertising, movies, comics, science fiction, popular music, developments in fashion and so on. They were motivated by a realisation that the post-war environment in which they operated was significantly changed by a culture increasingly determined by the mass media and the influence of American values, by significant social change brought about by new political regimes, by new technologies in for instance colour photography, widescreen cinema, LP records and Television, all of which had recently become available in 1950s Britain, and by the emergence new ways of thinking and theorising this new world and its nature. British Pop Art then arose from a new understanding of contemporary life and its profound transformations, one which the Independent Group members felt was not represented by older figurative and abstract artists.

Pop Artists in general then, not just those associated with the Independent Group, were acutely aware of significant changes in the discursive environment in the 1950s and wanted to reflect this in their work. Advertising in particular was something that exercised them early on and they handled these new images with serious reverence:

> To understand the advertisements which appear in the 'New Yorker' or 'Gentry' one must have taken a course in Dublin literature, read a 'Time' popularising article on cybernetics and to have majored in Higher Chinese Philosophy and Cosmetics … They are good 'images' and their technical virtuosity is almost magical. Many have involved as much effort for one page as goes into the

> building of a coffee-bar. And this transient thing is making a bigger contribution
> to our visual climate than any of the traditional fine arts. (Smithson and Smithson
> 1956)

Advertising images then were complex constructions that told us as much about our contemporary environment and society as, say, a renaissance landscape tells us about fifteenth-century Florence. And it was not simply the iconography of consumer culture that fascinated the Independent Group. The techniques employed were also widely discussed and employed by some artists to the extent that some Pop Art was aesthetically indistinguishable from the commercial visual culture that it aped.

After consumer culture and its iconography American culture and American values were the other major influence on the work of British Pop Artists, especially their early work. However, Pop was not a simple appropriation and re-packaging of American ideological and aesthetic weight, despite the fascination with American culture. In that fascination Pop Artists were merely reflecting a general trend and one can view Peter Blake's early obsession with Elvis Presley, Derek Boshier's use of cartoon characters in his collages, and Richard Hamilton's examinations of the sexualised style of automobile design, as reflective of a wider British social and cultural interest in America.

To communicate the nature of this new and rapidly evolving environment the Independent Group searched for a new artistic language. Indeed it is here that Isabelle Moffat sees the direct connection between Pop Art and the Festival of Britain. The Independent Group's quest for 'an artistic language capable of expressing precise meanings relevant to the postwar world', are she feels, intimately related to 'the models of perception, psychology, and language from which the Festival operated'. Both engendered a desire and drive to educate the spectator to make them perceive correctly and to understand 'a right, fixed, intentionally communicated message' (Moffat 2000: 91). Both then were intent upon creating environments that controlled the perceptions of spectators. Whilst it is certainly clear that the Independent Group were quite programmatic in their outlook, British Pop Art as it emerged later in the decade for me was looser and less educative in ambition. Nevertheless many practitioners felt that Pop Art was the art of rationality because it made reference to the real world in terms of its subjects as well as being open and clear. Stylistically however it was quite divergent and often quite abstract.

Stylistically British Pop Art can probably trace its early origins to Eduardo Paolozzi's 'BUNK' prints, a set of lithographic reproductions of collages assembled during the 1940s and 1950s from American magazines that he had collected in Paris. The prints were pages from the scrapbooks in which he constructed his collage. In 1952 Paolozzi, who had also been involved in the design of a fountain for the Festival of Britain, gave an Independent Group lecture at the ICA based upon the 'BUNK' prints projecting them via epidiascope onto a screen. The 'BUNK' collages very much predict the Pop style that would emerge later in the

1950s with juxtapositions of comic book characters, magazine cuttings, science fiction, technical and medical engineering illustrations and so on. The viewer of these pieces was asked to make their own interpretation from imagery that was familiar to them but placed in contexts that were less familiar.

Another founder artist of the Independent Group who is generally credited as a prime mover in the early development of British Pop Art was Richard Hamilton. Hamilton, who had worked as an engineering draughtsman, and in advertising, graduated from the Slade School of Art in 1951 and devised some of the most important early exhibitions at the ICA including the influential 1951 *Growth and Form* exhibition. *Growth and Form* is significant because it demonstrated the way in which artistic practices, like architecture, were also reflecting new understandings of nature. The principles of the exhibition built upon the D'arcy Wentworth Thompson's 1917 book *On Growth and Form* which, in short, proposed that objects were not simply physical forms but actual diagrams of the forces that moulded them. This process-oriented model is something that, as we have seen, was also adopted in other areas of design at the same time. The exhibition focused upon forms in nature and at a variety of scales from the microscopic (atomic particles) to the macroscopic (astronomy). In was not just then the visible phenomena that should interest us, the painter and sculptor Hamilton said had 'much to gain from the enlargement of their world experience by the appreciation of the forms in nature beyond their immediate visual environment. It is the enlarged environment opened by scientific studies that we would reveal for its visual qualities' (Hamilton 1951, quoted in Moffat 2000: 101).

Growth and Form was also innovative in its design and layout which took the form of an all-encompassing environment into which the viewer was immersed, walking through for instance projected images of X-rays and moving images of crystal growth. Two years later and in a similar 'environmental' style the ICA exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art* was shown. Although not organised by Hamilton but by the architects Alison and Peter Smithson, *Parallel of Life and Art* demonstrated the structural similarity of biological and engineered objects. That environmental, all-encompassing aesthetic was something that would be taken up and exploited by the counterculture in London almost 15 years later in happenings, lightshows and multi-media events (see Chapter 8).

Richard Hamilton's most famous work from the 1950s *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956) (see Figure 3.3) was assembled for the exhibition that he co-designed with John McHale and John Voelcker *This is Tomorrow* at the Whitechapel Gallery. *This is Tomorrow* was again a total environment into which the spectator was immersed and consisted of a series of confined spaces with various projections and illustrations from the new image saturated environment of the post-war world. The picture, like Paolozzi's BUNK, is a collage of images cut out from American magazines. The magazines had been amongst a number of found objects brought back from the United States by McHale following a visit in 1955, and the cut-outs were performed by Hamilton's wife following his cutting list: 'man, woman, humanity, history, food,

Figure 3.3   **Richard Hamilton, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, 1956. Collage 66 x 63 cm, Kunsthalle Tubingen, Germany**

Source: Kunsthalle Tubingen, used with permission.

newspapers, cinema, TV, telephone, comics (picture information), word (textual information), tape recording (aural information), cars, domestic appliances, space' (Hamilton 1982: 24). The cut-outs were carefully arranged to create an interior, domestic scene in perspective. In *Just What is It ...* Hamilton demonstrates his and the Independent Groups key obsessions commercial the language of advertising and American culture.

The Pop Art's Representational Project

Whilst there was, especially in Britain, no discernible visible unity to the Pop aesthetic, Pop Art was characterised by a well articulated cultural politics of non-representation. For Barthes, 'Pop Art's object ... is neither metaphoric nor metonymic; it presents itself cut off from its source and its surroundings ... no signified, no intention, anywhere' (1989: 25–26). Or, for Baudrillard, this, of course, is the logic of consumption upon which Pop Art was based '[q]uite literally, there is no longer any privileging of the object over the image in essence or signification' (1989: 34). These cultural politics were underpinned by a project to seize opportunities from a perceived break-down in hegemonic culture. For John Russell, Pop Art was 'a facet of a class struggle, real or imagined. It was a struggle fought by people who were for science against the humanities, for cybernetics against the revival of italic handwriting (Russell 1969: 32). These kinds of statements might seem quite far from some of the glitzy and apparently flippant products of Pop Art but it is worth recovering the subversive or critical edge, not least because it also helps makes connections with contemporaneous discourses of architecture and planning.

The political project of Pop Art was geared towards a self-conscious critique of hegemonic culture and hegemonic culture which they perceived was dominated by the mass media that had a depersonalising effect. Their paintings and sculptures were then intended to demonstrate how consciousness and values were altered as a result of exposure to mass media. To do this, Pop exploited styles and objects appropriated from the mass media itself using styles that were similarly impersonal and objectifying. In its content then, Pop Art dealt with cultural globalisation by working with mass produced images and artefacts as found objects. A common theoretical thread ties the activities of most Pop Artists. This stressed the breakdown of a range of established socio-cultural relationships in the electronic age. Specifically, it was the atomisation of society with which many worked. Lawrence Alloway's 'Long Front of Culture' referred to this reformulating social order with which the Pop Artist wished to communicate: The complex of information within the new multi-media environment gave rise to a situation in which there was no singular interpretation of art, a notion which borrowed from contemporary developments in literary criticism which itself had begun to consider the dynamics of reception and consumption: 'Just as the wholesale use of subception techniques is blocked by the different perception capacities of the members of any audience, so the mass media cannot reduce everybody to one drugged faceless consumer' (Alloway 1969: 42). John McHale, Alloway's fellow Independent Group member and supplier of Americana to Richard Hamilton noted that the hegemonic grip had (theoretically) loosened and the elite of an earlier 'vertical society' that directed cultural preferences had 'become simply one of a plurality of elites' (McHale 1969: 44).

Pop Art addressed this increasingly pluralistic and horizontal social order in both content and style. Pop culture and pop lifestyle was infiltrating public and

private life meaning that Pop Art was both accessible and understandable for the majority, so the pop aesthetic tended to enfranchise its consumer. The meanings of a work of Pop arose in the space between the work and the consumer and the style and content of Pop – everyday consumer iconography for instance – meant that the boundaries between life and art were less distinct. Borrowing from, amongst others, Marshall McLuhan, the enfranchisement of the Pop Art consumer in finding meaning during the electronic age was built upon the interchangeability between art and non-art, to a point where the total human condition could be considered a work of art.

Whilst the Pop Art style pre-dated and heavily influenced the boutique styles of Kings Road and Carnaby street fashion designers, many argue that in this appropriation of the style into the mainstream Pop Art did not lose its progressivism and that appropriation was actually attuned to the radical project of Pop Art: 'Pop Art makes capital visible' (Staniszewski 1989: 159). There are perhaps two aspects to this political project, the first concerned exposing the workings of capital by, for instance, displacing mass produced objects from their everyday context, and a second which involved forming the critical modern citizen by presenting art that could exist independently of any interpretations and be immediately comprehensible: 'A healing art ... a dis-ailenatory, non-discriminatory art: one that binds people together' (Russell 1969: 22).

This focus upon the new subjectivity, or indeed new humanity of the consumer of Pop aesthetics was inspired by the same ideas as the philosophies underpinning modernist design aesthetics discussed earlier in the chapter. As critic Suzi Gablik noted in 1969, a new consciousness was required to make sense a new environment in flux: the new mass media of the post-war period redefined the environment and necessitated 'a restructuring of our thoughts and feelings; they require new habits of attention with the ability to move in all directions and dimensions simultaneously'. The uncertainty of this new world required Pop Art and humans alike to constantly adapt to their changing environment, so that art was challenged by the constant redefinition of its boundaries – what is and is not art. Just as architects were charged with directing newly understood energies of the universe so Pop Artists were required to reflect a more 'process-oriented distribution of energy': 'Relativity and quantum mechanics have effected the shift from a timeless Euclidean world in which all is precise, determinate and invariable, to a non static universe where everything is relative, changing and in process' (Gablik 1969: 12).

That connection to new understandings of nature and the cosmos and the new subjectivities emerging as a result, whilst clearly present in Pop Art was more evident in Op Art. Ideas of perception, the human subject and cosmology can be more directly related to the new multi-media art forms that developed later in the 1960s and practised in London. For this reason, the remainder of this chapter is deals with Op Art.

Op Art

Op Art commonly consists of geometric, repeated patterns, the most renowned of which were graphically rendered in black and white and taken-up in fashion design in London by amongst others Mary Quant in the early 1960s. Op or optical paintings most closely resemble gestalt diagrams and were produced in the same spirit as their close relation, Pop Art, to connect with the psyche of the individual viewer. Unlike Pop however, Op was a generator of perceptual responses and is characterised by a dynamism that provokes illusory images and sensations in the viewer, whether this happens in the actual physical structure of the eye or the brain itself (Reichardt 1994: 239).

Op Art became prominent shortly after Pop Art's emergence and for a while – certainly in London in the early 1960s – the two styles came to define the zeitgeist. Like Pop, Op Art was both a British (and indeed European) and United States phenomena that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was not until 1964 however that it gained the name 'Op Art' which short-formed 'optical art' and first appeared in a *Time* magazine article in 1964 (*Time* 1964a, 1964b). The label probably stuck more for its rhymic echoes of Pop Art than its description of the aesthetic, because it had previously been also been called Perceptual Art and Retinal Art. Between two *Time* articles in May and October of 1964 the term 'Optical Art' emerged and, as is generally the case whenever a group of cultural producers find a media generated label imposed upon them, they tend to disclaim membership if the group. Also like Pop it is difficult to define a commonality in style and presentation for Op Art. It has however provoked common critical responses, the most prominent of which suggested that while essentially formal, abstract and exact, the aesthetic concerned above all else, illusion. Op generated perceptual responses upon viewing and seemed to posses a dynamic mobile quality that had a tendency to provoke illusory images and sensations in the spectator and bring into doubt 'normal processes of seeing' (Reichardt 1994: 239). For some Op artists and critics this experience was part of the activation of a new way of seeing where the primary aim of the art was not 'beauty of form, tasteful relationships, nor equilibrium in the old sense, but the activation of vision', heralding the emergence of 'a new level of visual sensibility' (Seitz, 1965a: 30). In perceiving a painting the viewer was a partner in reciprocal perceptual experiences where meanings arose in the space between viewer and painting, so that the 'quintessential and most dramatic space of all' is that between the spectator and the canvas. Here is art critic Bryan Robertson discussing this process with respect to the work of Bridget Riley:

> This is the real arena of dramatic confrontation, the receptacle for transmissions from that picture plane which … serves primarily as a sounding board or a magnetic field in reverse: transmitting colour and light, or light as colour, which do not exist in themselves on the actual surface of her paintings. They come into being, incorporeal and always unexpected, unpredictable, at a precise stage in their journey toward you. (Robertson 1971: 7)

To generate reciprocal perceptual responses early Op Art tended to use geometric and asymmetric monochrome patterns of repeated shapes and forms creating swirling but regular patterns. To create these visual effects a level of precision was required, a precision that often purposefully tended to remove the presence of the artist from the work. Op paintings are not then characterised by considered, painterly brush strokes because all is subsumed to the project of producing the desired visual effect, everything in an Op painting is meticulously planned and mechanically executed. For Op Artist Victor Vasarely this was because 'works of art should become available to all and discard their uniqueness' (Reichardt 1994: 241). And for critic Carlo McCormick, 'Op tried to erase the presence of the artist's ego, and to replace it with transcendence' (McCormick 1985: 90).

In terms of artistic production Op Art entered public consciousness in the early 1960s in Britain through a series of one-woman shows by the foremost British Op Artist Bridget Riley and globally with the exhibition in 1965 at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), *The Responsive Eye*. However probably long before they were aware of a new genre of painting most would have encountered the Op aesthetic in their everyday environment. It was through the infiltration of the style into the everyday in the form of fashions, advertising, packaging, tableware and other household objects that most people encountered Op. Op appeared in art and on everyday objects, on 'esoteric and the popular' apparently simultaneously and was by 1965 a 'household phrase' (Reichardt 1994: 240). London especially adopted the Op aesthetic as a recognisably swinging style (see Hewison 1986: 48–49). This then was a style that was swiftly appropriated and popularised much to the disgust of the artists themselves: 'those logo-like, buzzy, cheeky, and confrontational "Op" paintings were too easily absorbed into the commercial style-revolution of the sixties' (Morley 1999: 562). Riley for instance …

> began to grow restive, if not angry, over the fact that the imagery she had so scrupulously brought into being was beginning to be plagiarized by manufacturers of fabrics, wallpapers, and any number of other commercial products … I found myself being vulgarized, plagiarized, trivialized, and put firmly out of court as an artist … I saw my images appearing on women's dresses, on matchboxes, on linens, on towels – you name it! It was incredible! Well, I sued everybody I could for plagiarism. (Gruen 1991: 156).

Unlike Pop Artists who, ironically at least, would have welcomed the commercialisation of their aesthetic, Riley was very uncomfortable with it because it undermined and sullied something she felt profound and hard-won.

Whilst some have argued, including of course the artists themselves, that the appropriation of Op aesthetic into the everyday commercial visual culture of the early to mid 1960s was a debasement (see Lee 2001), for me that is not the case. The appropriation was pretty much simultaneous suggesting that the time was ripe for such and aesthetic and that is seemed to fit with the zeitgeist. It is a style redolent of the sublime realm of modern science and technology and the early 1960s were

a period celebrating the white heat of technology. The excitement that surrounded new developments in science, technology and electronic communication during the period meant that an aesthetic that presented shifting patterns of elemental forms, light and waves of energy was familiar. The commercial appropriation of Op was not then the result of its abstract form: that since nothing figurative or representational appears, and that because it is only in the process of their consumption – in the interaction between viewer and painting – that meaning is generated, that somehow commodification of the style was relatively simple. Rather, the appropriation of the style both shaped and built upon a change in taste during the period in which multi-faceted and multi-dimensional visuality came to take precedence over lineal textuality. That change in taste reflected a more widespread acceptance of new ideas about nature and the cosmos discussed in relation to design and architecture earlier.

The Cosmic Nature of Op: Riley

I have argued more extensively elsewhere that Op Art, especially the work of Bridget Riley, was more thoroughly engaged in a representation of nature than has been appreciated (see Rycroft 2005). This is a characteristic that applies to Op Art in general and not just Bridget Riley's work but does not relate to conventional form of representing and enframing nature, but rather a representational practice that enacts nature and its processes in three interrelated ways: the first concerns the manipulation of the natural embodied processes of vision and perception; the second concerns the representation of the visual and perceptual experience of nature in process; and the third concerns the way on which the Op Art aesthetic reflects an understanding of what I have called cosmic nature emergent and popular in the post-war period. To understand the importance of the latter it is worth also explaining the first two, not least because it helps contextualise aspects of countercultural practices later in the decade. This will be done in relation to Riley's work because her style was most influential on the London scene, of all Op Artists, Riley has received the most considered criticism and she had also made a number of statements concerning the role of nature in her work.

In terms of the nature of perception, Riley's paintings in themselves have been considered 'spontaneous acts of nature': in arranging forms and elements in defined patterns she is 'showing us what we did not know before', actually bringing 'acts of nature' into existence (Robertson 1971: 17). These are not however representations of nature 'out there', but the natural processes invoked in the mind and the body when perceiving one of her images. This arose from the essentially abstract forms of her work, abstracted to the extent that they did not recall in the viewer any conceptual associations, references to prior experience, nor the artist's ego. Rather they activated an innate process of vision that would only be altered or deflected by figurative association – horizontal lines and shapes for instance tend to be avoided by perceptual painters because they might suggest a landscape to the viewer. For Riley this process of abstraction was founded upon a belief that this innate vision could uncover, in

a phenomenological sense, the invisible, essential meanings of certain objects and patterns, and by experimenting with particular shapes in a disciplined, restricted and formal framework the invisible could be visualised and perceived (de Sausmarez 1970: 59). This then was nature in the making, the mobilisation of elemental units arranged in relation to one another in order to reveal the 'physiology of other unseen factors'. By allowing visual phenomena to speak for themselves in patterns that evoked physical expressions of psychic states then, she was engaged in 'releasing dormant or previously invisible energies from colour and light' (Robertson 1971: 6). 'I feel' she once said 'that my paintings have some affinity with happenings where the disturbance precipitated is latent in the sociological and psychological situation. I want the disturbance or "event" to arise naturally, in visual terms, out of the inherent energies and characteristics of the elements that I use' (Robertson 1971: 11).

This experience was not corporeally limited to the eye and the mind of the viewer, but thoroughly embodied; internalised as a changing set of physical responses and realisations. These responses and realisations not only refer to the senses of nausea, wooziness and general disorientation that concerned her
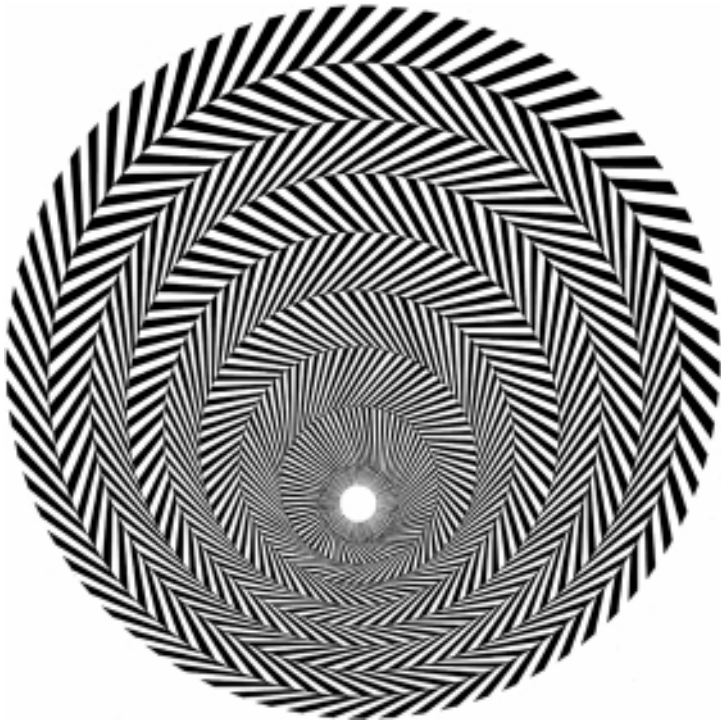
Figure 3.4   Bridget Riley, *Blaze 4*, 1964. Emulsion on hardboard 94.6 x 94.6 cm
Source: © Bridget Riley, 2010. All rights reserved.

critics and fascinated her supporters, but the ways the viewer was made aware of the natural processes of his or her own body. The enlightened outcome of this perceptual-corporeal experience was thought to be, in the patient viewer, a state of heightened awareness and wakefulness to the previously invisible: 'The optical challenge in Riley's work, given time, is tonic, bracing, and relates to new physical conditions or facts, received optically, which stimulate the imagination as much as they extend our knowledge of nature' (Robertson 1971: 9). Here the Op project bears many similarities to other forms of cultural politicking from the mid 1960s which sought, though a variety of practices, to overcome technocratic control through the manipulation and awakening of the subconscious being including as we will see in the second half of this book, R.D. Laing's psychoanalytic therapy, the sacramental use of hallucinogens, and developments in underground cinema and performance.

Whilst Riley and connoisseurs of her work have frequently discussed these issues of the nature of perception and vision and its role in her aesthetic – she once said for instance that, 'even smells, noise and so on, have a visual equivalent and can be presented through a sort of vocabulary of signs' (de Sausmarez 1970: 60) – it is only recently that Riley has begun to reflect on a more conventional mode of representing nature in her work:

> Swimming through the oval, saucer-like reflections, dipping and flashing on the sea surface, one traced the colours back to the origins of those reflections. Some came directly from the sky and different coloured clouds, some from the golden greens of vegetation growing on the cliffs, some from the red–orange of the seaweed on the blues and violets of adjacent rocks, and, all between, the actual hues of the water, according to its various depths and over what it was passing. The entire elusive, unstable, flicking complex subject to the changing qualities of the light itself. On a fine day, for instance, all was bespattered with the glitter of bright sunlight and its tiny pinpoints of virtually black shadow – it was a though one was swimming through a diamond. (Riley 1999: 30)

In this passage Riley is recalling her experience of bathing in the sea in Cornwall. In the early 1980s she began to recount her experience of perceiving nature and there are many passages like this that explore the effect of light and the apparent release of energy from animate and inanimate objects. While she might not represent nature in a figurative sense, nature, or more precisely the processes of nature as they are perceived and experienced, are central to her work. She observed for instance the play of light on the surface of rock and the ways in which it seemed to disintegrate the solid surface, the heat-haze transfiguring a plain in an Italian landscape, the movement of deep grass agitated by the wind, and from these visual experiences produced apparently abstract graphs of 'light and dark, movement and stillness, and other oppositions in nature from which [she] may have isolated one principle in particular with which to animate the forms on a canvas' (Robertson 1971: 8).

Like Pop Art, Angry writing and many other representational practices of the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was in the Op aesthetic a desire to reawaken the viewer to their reality. In the case of Riley this concerned reawakening a childlike appreciation of nature and its processes. Above all, those pleasures of sight are innate, they take one by surprise, they are sudden, swift, fleeting, elusive and enigmatic and in terms of representational practice, impossible to prolong or recapture. 'One can stare at a landscape, for example, which a moment ago seemed vibrant and find it dull and inert'. Logically for her, these qualities could not be latent in nature itself but arose from an interaction between the perceiver and the view, a convergence which 'releases a particular alchemy, momentarily turning the commonplace into the ravishing' (Riley 1999: 30). This experience is for Riley more open to children because with age, preoccupations and conventions obscured innate vision. Nature then, no longer appears to us as a pure revelation but is lost through accretions of experience and association. To reawaken the viewer to this vision required an art that represented, mediated or evoked in the mind and body of the viewer this moment, to 'bring about a fresh way of seeing again what had already almost certainly been experienced, but which had been either dismissed or buried by the passage of time' (Riley 1999: 33). Her pictures presented a simulacra of the patterns in nature that she perceived in order to encourage the development of a new way of seeing nature through the 'agency of involuntary memories' (Kudielka 1992: 22). 'Isn't it curious' she once remarked 'that nature immediately looks so much better once I've got a painting together' (Kudielka 1992: 12).

Bridget Riley and the Op aesthetic then were concerned with affecting the sensibilities of those who encountered their pictures of, like numerous other aesthetic projects of the mid-twentieth century, making the invisible visible. For the philosopher, priest and art critic Cyril Barrett this was fundamental: Op artists were engaged in bringing to our senses the basic forces of a newly conceived nature 'giving a visual equivalent of certain aspects of nature – heat, energy, the action of light – by causing us to experience through visual and pictorial means something of the effects of these "immaterial" or invisible forces' (Barrett 1970: 184). Accordingly, the viewer of an Op painting would, through the reciprocal perceptual experience, be awakened from their 'submissive drowsiness' and attain an enlightened understanding of a diversified cosmos. Op Artists responded to the same new and ever changing discursive environment as Pop Artists in their practices and the lack of conventional pictorial or painterly elements in an Op painting mirrored the tendency in a new mass media environment for constant change and lack of fixity. Op Artist Victor Vasarely was particularly vocal in this regard: To make sense of such new understandings, Vasarely thought, required an art which would position 'man' as integral to the a highly diversified universe in which 'every event, and therefore himself as well, proceeds from the wave–particle duality'. The artist could no longer stand outside his or her object; 'he is involved by the very fact that he is a material, albeit infinitesimal component of nature and, like a tree or a cloud, is drawn into the material whirlpool of energy and movement, time and waves'. Equally, to look at an optical painting was not

to be a detached observer but to be drawn into the 'event' as part of it: 'We – the stellar galaxies and ourselves – become elements in that vast, complex, energised system which embraces the infinitesimally small as well as the immeasurably great and is yet basically as simple as the black square or the white line' (Vasarely quoted in Barrett 1970: 64).

Op then took on board new understandings of cosmic nature and in the case of Riley it seems to be ideas around energy and mass from popularised versions of the theory of relativity that exercised her in particular: what was solid could easily become invisible as 'energy' and vice-versa. In her art it manifests itself in both the paintings themselves and in her own and others writings about her work which muse upon the interaction of light, heat and energy as they interact with the body of the viewer: 'The paintings act like electrical discharges of energy making immediate contact with our neural mechanisms' (de Sausmarez 1970: 29). One also gets an impression of the way she activated this cosmic nature in accounts of her working practices The 'vast reserves of energy in everything' can best be released she feels by relieving them of the burden of carrying figurative meaning, by allowing them to operate freely within her formal framework thereby stimulating or realising a 'truly creative power' (Robertson 1971: 8). This she feels has 'something to do with allowing the energies room to breathe … If they are handled freely, those energies will come though full-charted. I never feel that I confer any energy on anything, it's all there to be unlocked and articulated' (de Sausmarez 1970: 59). Riley positions herself as a cipher for these uncharted energies as if orchestrating their movements and transposing them into pure, essential forms on her canvasses. While not fully verbalised, this process has something to do with the ways in which the artist's mind and body interact with materiality – literally, the brush, paint and canvas – in the act of painting cosmic relations, whereby 'contact is made with the extra-personal forces and energies, universal factors … calculated relationships brought to a precise point of tension bring into being, or liberate, a field of energies that reveal a new dimension of experience and beauty' (de Sausmarez 1970: 20). Her role was to act as an 'imaginative catalyst for unknown elements' (Robertson 1971: 18). Aesthetically then, these fundamental energies are revealed in her work through pure plastic relations gleaned through a phenomenological approach that isolates and amplifies essential forms and relationships so bringing to the senses of the viewer previously invisible energies. This then is an intentionally intuitive method that directed itself towards the unconscious, pre-cognitive being of both artist and viewer with the pictorial methods acting as agents in this process of transformation from form to energy.

Crucially, the matter of nature was only temporarily fixed in its current solid state, to be released at some later stage as energy, and later still to form new objects in the universe. Riley's own observations of nature usually work through the effect of heat and especially light in visually disintegrating solid objects. Viewing the spring Hofgarten scene in Munich for instance, she observed the way in which the 'bright, almost palpable shine which filled the air disintegrated into countless fragments, colours, reflections and shadows which in turn seemed to destroy

the solidity and weight of objects' (Kudielka 1992: 9). She made observations from such scenes and translated them into forms and patterns on her canvasses and suggested to the viewer a sense of dematerialisation, as the forms seemed to shift and change shape and colour upon perception. Furthermore, for Riley this consciousness of a new understanding of nature was fundamentally embodied. It was only in the act of perceiving that both artist and viewer could comprehend the conception of a cosmic nature and then, with both mind and body. So, she believed, it was 'not the actual sea, the individual rocks or valleys in themselves which constituted the essence of vision but that they were agents of a greater reality, of a bridge which sight throws from our innermost heart to the furthest extension of that which surrounds us' (Riley 1999: 33).

Connections

We will see later in the second half of the book that similar discourses and similar motivations underpinned countercultural cultural politics and practices in London including the multi-media lightshow and the underground press. In this chapter what has been located in three aesthetic practices – in architecture and design, in Pop Art and in Op Art – was the operation of a similar, shared vision of cosmic nature. In the next chapter I want to trace the ways in which these aesthetic practices were used to shape the image of Swinging London, of how, in other words they came to form the style of early 1960s London.

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Chapter 4
Mapping Swinging London

There is now a curious cultural community, breathlessly *à la Mod*, where Lord Snowdon and the other desperadoes of the grainy layout jostle with commercial art-school Mersey stars, window dressers and Carnaby Street pants-peddlers. Style is the thing here – Taste 64 – a cool line and the witty insolence of youth. Jonathan Miller, cited by Booker (1970: 225).

In this chapter I want to draw together the styles, aesthetics, thoughts, theories and actions explored in the previous two chapters in a mapping of Swinging London. This chapter is about the stereotypical Swinging London, that is, the fantastical and outrageous London of the early to mid-1960s that shapes the popular consciousness of not just London but of Britain in the 1960s. This youthful and frivolous city was the subject of countless magazine articles, songs and was featuring regularly on the cinema screens, often in Technicolor. And at this juncture it is important to state that this pop urbanity was not a universally experienced one in mid-1960s London. The Swinging London that is presented in this chapter was definitely for the young, the middle class and West End centred and it did not filter through to working class communities in the East End, stylistically or otherwise. Indeed, even amongst some young and middle class Londoners the swinging city was considered as simply a diversion: Throughout the early 1960s the experimental spirit of the Independent Group continued in ironic celebration of consumerism and Americanisation in the city and other artists and performers like Jeff Nuttall were engaged in subverting Swinging London in various early happening-like events. Nevertheless whilst it is important to acknowledge the exclusivity and the dissenting voices, it does not lessen the importance of Swinging London as a powerful moment of image making with very real material effect. Swinging London was then a powerful hybrid, part myth and part reality.

15 April 1966

To navigate this complex real and mythical landscape I will use one of the most famous representations of Swinging London, *Time* magazine's 15 April 1966 edition which featured a piece entitled 'Great Britain: you can walk across it on the grass'. Whilst there are other pieces on Swinging London from the time, it was Piri Halasz's cover story that is widely regarded at the most influential. Halasz would become even more closely associated with mediating 1960s London for American tourists in her guidebook *A Swingers Guide to London* (1967) published just one year after the *Time* feature. Like her original intention for the *Time* piece,

Figure 4.1   Geoffrey Dickinson's *Time* cover
Source: © Time Inc. Used with permission.

the guidebook was less about museums, urban walks and architecture and more about how to be swinging: what to read, what to wear, where to be seen and so on. Whilst editorial changes considerably altered this original intention, the *Time* feature still reflects this ambition.

Halasz had visited London in 1965 and was assisted in her researches by seven staffers at *Time*'s London bureau and five British and US photographers, a research effort that involved 'the most concentrated swinging – discothèques, restaurants, art gallery and private parties, gambling, pub crawling – that any group of individuals has ever enjoyed or suffered, depending on your point of view'. A final member of the team was the British illustrator Geoffrey Dickinson who created the cover. Dickinson according to the editors, 'prowled from Carnaby Street to King's Road, slipping in and out of boutiques and coffeehouses, among other places' to find inspiration for his now iconic piece of cover art.

It is worth dwelling on Geoffrey Dickinson's cover before looking more closely at the contents. Stylistically the cover quite faithfully recreates the Pop style that is, a specifically British Pop Art style. It is resolutely British not simply because of the subject, the new London scene. In terms of technique and style is resembles a hybrid Richard Hamilton-Peter Blake assemblage. Produced in the collage style, the cover according to Dickinson included 'bits of just about everything – acrylics, watercolor, chalk, pen and ink, labels'. The collage or assemblage style was very much *en vogue*, a cut-up aesthetic that also shaped movies emerging about London during the same period, and the cover, as we will see, is quite thorough in its representation of the text produced by the journalists inside the magazine, not least in the garish and bright colour scheme. Featured on the cover are the icons of Swinging London: the discothèques and casinos, the double decker buses, Rolls Royces and Mini Coopers, the Welsh Guards, the Prime Minister and pop musicians. Here too is the style or iconography of the swinging city: the Op inspired fashions freshly ripped from the walls of Mayfair galleries; the photographer to emphasise that image and image production were central to Swinging London; and the Union Jack. The Union Jack appears several times in the cover forming for instance the night sky, as a badge, as sunglasses and as a flag flown by the Harold Wilson caricature. The long front of culture had broadened the definition of Art. For Bryan Appleyard (1984), art was a term which was 'applied to everything as a quality to be glimpsed by the chic and hip in its most transient manifestations' (Appleyard 1984: 30), 'even dress was deep … It was no accident that the Union Jack became a familiar and oddly ambiguous emblem of the 1960s. Anything ... could be art'. (Appleyard 1984: 34).

The collage style too enables the juxtaposition of very different objects and subjects in a manner that the *Time* journalists insisted was in the nature of the swinging scene of which they wrote, particularly the juxtaposition of old and new London in terms of heritage and class and the classy and the crass. The aristocracy and the nouveau riche appear cheek-by-jowl for instance although in rather different contexts: royals in Mini Coopers and Beatles (or at least two men with Beatles haircuts) are driving a Rolls Royce. The 'old' establishment represented by icons such as the Rolls Royce and the Welsh Guards and personalities like Prime Minister Harold Wilson, the royal figures in the Mini Coopers and the woman at the roulette table, are confined the right hand side of the cover image by St. Stephen's Tower and the Houses of Parliament. Traditional London in the form of the Houses of Parliament, the double decker bus with bowler-hatted passengers is juxtaposed to the new, youthful London represented in the form of assorted longhairs, outrageous fashions and at least one person who appears doped-out. These juxtapositions however are not contradictions because they resolve themselves in the pop image of Swinging London. Indeed, the contemporary Pop penchant for mosaic-like presentations as practised by news magazines seemed to faithfully represent the similarly fragmenting and 'softer' city which *Time* attempted to map. Swinging London represented one expression of the democratisation of art. For the Americans at *Time*, London had

achieved a new type of civilisation, a civilisation moulded by a new citizen who represented their beliefs through a democratised and inclusive aesthetic – pop.

The Young Americans

The *Time* piece opens with a bold claim: every decade has its iconic city: the 1910s had Vienna; the 1920s Paris; the 1930s Berlin; the 1940s New York; the 1950s Rome; the 1960s belonged to London. London was now the city which was experiencing a renaissance and attracting international attention, setting the social and cultural markers for the rest of the world. Here was a city, 'seized by change and liberated by affluence' a city that had suddenly 'burst into bloom'. 'It swings; it is the scene'. It is quite clear who, for *Time* were responsible for this reimagination of London – the young. Britain had become a much younger country as a result of the post–war baby boom and the youth were by the mid 1960s a sizeable and quite affluent community in their own right. For example, between 1956 and 1963 the number of 15 to 19 year olds had increased by 20 per cent and they were a natural target of both journalists and marketers (Curtis 2004). Indeed it difficult to find an account of Swinging London that does not focus upon the young as a significant and powerful group:

> … the changes in tastes, behaviour and attitudes of the younger generation over the last few years have at least to a small extent influenced the lives of every Londoner under the age of 35 … Therefore it seems to me that the inflated ballyhoo about Swinging London does have some serious relevance to the generation of which I am writing, particularly through its indirect influence on advertising and communications, so I make no apology for giving so many pages over to what may seem essentially frivolous people. (Aitken 1967: 10)

Despite claiming that this renaissance was the result of a 'Bloodless Revolution' on the part of the young meteors some dissenting voices are also represented in the piece, voices of those who find the decadence distasteful. London apparently reserved quieter spaces for these in squares like Belgravia and suburbs like Richmond. Nevertheless, Britain had 'lost an Empire and lightened the pound. In the process, it [had] also recovered a lightness of heart lost during the weighty centuries of world leadership'. It had become once again, the 'lusty town of William Shakespeare' – the theatre was in the midst of a second Elizabethan era, cinema was undergoing a renaissance and the city was run by an all-new 'swinging meritocracy'.

Fantastical to be sure and it is impossible to ignore as Robert Hewison observes in *Too Much* (1986), that this was a fantasy broadcast by American journalists. One of the *Time* staffers working on the article, Andrea Adam, confirmed this when she recalled her involvement in researching the piece to Jonathan Green. Swinging London was not to be a cover feature, but was to be used as a structuring

concept woven into accounts of the changes in the fabric of London, a city with which they had all become fascinated. One of the reasons for their fascination was the way in which old and new cultures were blending in London. Despite the occasional grump in Richmond or Belgravia then, what they noted was that there seemed to be a mixing of old and new cultures – or more accurately old and new aristocracies. Intending to highlight these socio-cultural phenomena, the coverage was for Adam watered down by the editorial management's obsession with miniskirts and a new sexual morality. However, lessons were drawn back to the United States: The maturity of British culture was evidenced in the way it had seemed to evolve beyond class structures: a classlessness actually emerging from the aristocracy itself who were seen as central to the project of Swinging London (Green 1988: 86). The article certainly celebrates a sense of atomistic social mobility and this myth was played back upon London to the extent that 'in the summer of 1966, it appeared to come true' (Hewison 1986: 78).

The image of a suddenly frivolous city in which old money and new money mixed freely and in which the old barriers to social mobility had lifted of course struck many as an exaggeration. Swinging London, in image at least, did propagate the myth of a classless society administered by new elite, the 'New Aristocracy' chosen on the grounds of merit, whose talents for design and innovation provided a seemingly inexhaustible supply of new products and images, satisfying ever diversifying consumer desires. Richard Hoggart in his study of contemporary working class culture *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) noted that it was an inescapable fact that the nation was becoming classless – or at least more middle-class, opening his account as follows: 'It is often said that there are no working-classes in England now, that a "bloodless revolution" has taken place, which has so reduced social differences that already most of us inhabit an almost flat plain, the plain of the lower middle- to middle-classes' (Hoggart 1958: 13). Hoggart, the first director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, argued that this emergent classlessness was a cultural classlessness rather than a political or economic classlessness and he bemoaned both aspects: 'The old forms of class culture are in danger of being replaced by a poorer kind of classless … "faceless", culture, and this is to be regretted' (Hoggart 1958: 343). Working class culture was he argued being corrupted by the 'admass' world of 'chain-store modernisimus', by pin-ups, pop music and pulp fiction (Hoggart 1958: 24, 40–41, 46–50).

Interestingly, Hoggart is quoted in rather a different light and slightly out of context in the *Time* article. In it he is identified as one of the provincials who were now shaping Britain and who were from 'the ranks of the British lower middle and working class, which never before could find room at the top … Says Sociologist Richard Hoggart, 47, himself a slum orphan from industrial Leeds: "A new group of people is emerging into society, creating a kind of classlessness and a verve which has not been seen before"'. In truth, Richard Hoggart's project at the time was to ensure that the kind of frivolous and lightweight pop culture that seemed to have besieged London did not become common place and that mass culture should be challenging and sophisticated. I would argue that it already was.

Hoggart's mission, one that was shared by a number of commentators at the time had more than a sniff of anti-Americanism about it. However, apart from the occasional aside at Hollywood values there is little explicit anti-Americanism in the *Uses of Literacy*, but in this period the rise of mass culture was synonymous with the importation of American culture and so an attack on the former implied a critique of the latter. The idea of a classless society in Britain at this time can be traced not only to the 'rise of the meritocracy' (Young 1958), but also to a perception of an increasing transatlantic influence. This notional classlessness can be seen to emulate and mirror the way that the United States projected the myth of atomistic social mobility to the rest of the world in their own post-war consumer boom. And it was here that the connection between the rise of consumer culture and Americanisation was made. Many at the time and since interpret what was happening in London during the early to mid 1960s as an American mediated myth. Here was the most powerful nation in the world made even more powerful by the Second World War importing meritocracy and a myth of classlessness on the back of the Marshall Plan.

At the heart of Swinging London myth there is a curious contradiction, that despite being mediated and heavily influenced by American cultural values, Swinging London was also rather ambivalent toward American culture. Not only is it there in the often ironic celebration of American values and popular culture in British Pop Art, but it is also there in other representations of post-war London. We find it for instance in Colin MacInnes's account of an emergent swinging scene in his novel *Absolute Beginners* (1959). *Absolute Beginners* follows a young photographer around late 1950s London and explores this infiltration of American culture and the conflicts these changes sparked within the youth scene:

> 'But I thought ... you didn't approve of the American influence. I mean, I know you don't care for Elvis, and you do like Tommy [Steele]'.
> 'Now listen glamour puss … Because I want English kids to be English kids, not West Ken Yanks and bogus imitation Americans, that doesn't mean I'm anti the whole US thing…The thing is, to support the local product … we've got to produce our own variety [of teenage movement] and not imitate the Americans'. (MacInnes 1972: 49)

In MacInnes's 1950s account London is clearly a city that was already becoming re-imagined and re-imaged by the young and he uses a photographer as his protagonist to underline this: there was a new and rapidly expanding demand for images in new picture orientated magazines, record company promotional materials and from fashion designers, because of emergent youth scenes in London.

For MacInnes's biographer Tony Gould, his London novels and essays in *New Society*, *Encounter* and *Queen* helped forge our image of the era and the teenage revolution that defined it. Unlike Christopher Booker, the shattering events which questioned Establishment morality for MacInnes, were not political scandals like the Profumo affair nor cultural revolutions, but political events at home and abroad

which seemed to question the political legitimacy of the establishment. MacInnes was particularly affected by the Suez crisis in 1956 and later in the decade, the Nottingham and Notting Hill 'race' riots, each putting paid to the idea that Britain, particularly white Britain, could still claim any kind of moral leadership (Gould 1983: 134). Many of the accounts in the final chapters of *Absolute Beginners* were worked up from newspaper accounts of the riots in the *Manchester Guardian*, MacInnes fleshing out the facts and anecdotes with fictional characters and actions. If there were an emergent classless, meritocratic society, without national boundaries, it was, for MacInnes, the teenagers: 'Suddenly, teenagers were the ones with the spending money; whole businesses were geared to their needs' (Gould 1983: 127). *Absolute Beginners* however, traces the character changes in its protagonist from jazz groupie to modern hipster, rejecting the commercialism of Trad jazz, pop music and the new culture industry (see Lodge 1962), a similar transition in image that would occur to London later in the decade.

Swinging London's Geometries of Power

Whether this was a home-grown youthful revolution, one which was spurred on by exposure to American values, or some combination of both, is not so significant here. What is important is that despite all of the critical accounts of London during this period and as a myth factory, and despite the fact that it was certainly exaggerated, there was a change in the geopolitics of the city. The new establishment represented on the pages of various American magazines and increasingly on movie screens had shifted the geometries of power westwards. The cultural renaissance mapped out in these texts and in the April 1966 edition of *Time* facilitated a geographical shift in the centres of moral and political power. The pillars of London, and by implication British, civic society had been surpassed: older Tory–Liberal Establishment figures, who oversaw the empire from the clubs on Pall Mall and St. James's, and the influence of the City, Oxbridge and the Church had waned in favour of the youthful and 'surprising new leadership community' whose locus of power resided further west in Mayfair (see Rycroft 2002).

Emerging from *Time*'s representation of the swinging city and in common with representations of the city and its social order in other media from the period was a 'swinging subject'. The swinging Londoner represented in these accounts was of course classless – or rather class was not established as an issue of concern be they aristocratic or provincial working class in origin – and they both embodied and performed the swinging style, whether that be a swinging saunter or wearing Op inspired make-up. This new subject emerged from the softer city that was mapped in the *Time* article, one in the process of modernisation without imposing technocratic order and one which honoured the individual and self expression: Swinging London was liberating, recognising and honouring individuality: 'In texture, it has developed into a soft, pleasant place in which to live and work, a city increasing its talents for organising a modern society without loosing ...
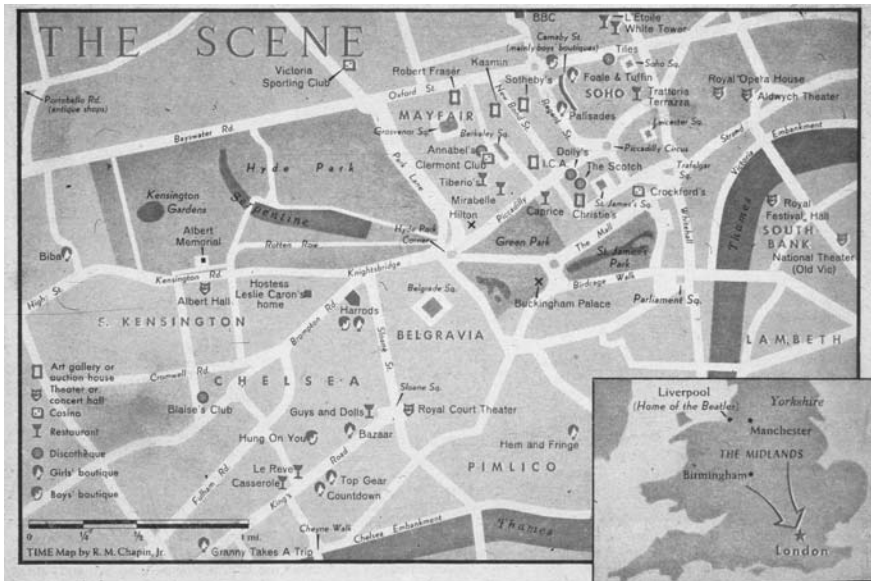
Figure 4.2   The Swinging London 'scene' as mapped by *Time*
Source: © 1966 Time Inc., reprinted by permission.

simple humanity'. Right at the end of the article, and this is perhaps where Piri Halasz's voice emerges less scathed by the editing, swinging is presented as a serious business because it is classless:

> The London that has emerged is swinging, but in a far more profound sense than the colorful and ebullient pop culture by itself would suggest London has shed much of its smugness, much of the arrogance that often went with the stamp of privilege, much of its false pride – the kind that long kept it shabby and shopworn in physical fact and spirit. It is a refreshing change, and making the scene is the Londoner's way of celebrating it.

This new leadership community, whilst operating from a separate geographical space were by no means all, as the *Time* piece tends to over-emphasise, outside the ranks of the old establishment – the new elite totally disregarding of history and tradition and many of the 'old' aristocracy a key figures in the swinging scene: 'much of the Establishment has joined the swinging London atmosphere, encouraged by the likes of Princess Margaret and Antony Armstrong-Jones'. Youth and youthfulness was more important than class in Swinging London meaning that representations of the swinging scene as it was retained elements of traditional and Establishment values. And those in the new establishment occupied themselves with jobs that reflected the key shifts in post-war British society: made up of

'economists, professors, actors, photographers, singers, admen, T.V. executives and writers'. It is not surprising given the nature of Swinging London as a space of myth-making and self-promotion that many of these professions were image makers.

The shift in the cultural geographies generated by this army of image makers is clear to see in the tourist map of 'The Scene' that appears in the *Time* feature (see Figure 4.2). 'The Scene' map, which plots the places and points of interest mentioned in the article – boutiques, discotheques, casinos and galleries, and so on – features in the bottom right-hand corner an inset map of England and Wales which serves to locate London for the American readership, but the arrow doing so also emphases one of the other points of the article, that London had absorbed the provincial cultural renaissance of the previous few years. Territories such as Yorkshire, and the Midlands and more specific places like Birmingham and Liverpool (of course labelled 'Home of the Beatles') appear at the wide open end of a large arrow that narrows and funnels into London in the South East. The new establishment who make up the social scene of the swinging city are not only identified as being distinctly working- or lower middle-class but also hailing from provincial towns and industrial cities sporting their distinct regional accents 'like badges'.

Within the map of London 'The Scene' itself stretches from Soho to South Kensington, so incorporating the two main axes of Swinging London, the Kings Road and Carnaby Street, with the important territories of Mayfair and Chelsea between them. Apart from boutiques like 'Hung on You' and 'Top Gear', London's traditional ceremonial landscapes are also mapped, and not simply as orientation points or standard tourist locations. Buckingham Palace is marked for instance also because it and the royal family are treated as very much part of the swinging scene. In November 1963 The Beatles were summoned to a Royal command performance and one year later were awarded MBEs. The Beatles had of course themselves recently made the move from the provinces to London and were the stars of what many believe is one of the first Swinging London movies, Richard Lester's *A Hard Days Night* (1964). So even with this social revolution mapped by *Time*, was a space for traditional pomp, circumstance and the colour of Royal pageantry. Christopher Booker's more cynical view of neophiliac London suggested a similar blend of new and establishment London where the youthful revolution's backdrop was the 'seemingly timeless background of Rolls-Royces and Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace and the swans on the lake at St. James's Park' (Booker 1970: 17). Indeed the swinging scene itself was as much about performance and exhibition as the Changing of the Guards. As the article noted then, the guards 'now change at Buckingham Palace to a Lennon and McCartney tune, and Prince Charles is firmly in the long hair set'.

The geometries of power had shifted in London, at least in the imagination of the city in the mid 1960s. These shifts are also expressed on the map. The second Elizabethan era that *Time* suggests the city's theatres are undergoing was in fact driven by playwrights with a reputation for risqué and adventurous plays. These

were the Angry writers discussed in Chapter 2 and it was these writers and their backers that were now the new 'commanders of the British Empire'. Their base of operations was the South Bank following the recent opening of the National Theatre in 1963 – a cause they had championed for some years (Tynan 1964: 39–40). The Arts Council, through the New Activities Committee, was by 1966 increasingly interested in subsidising 'fringe' theatre activities, and both major political parties were committed to sustaining a National Theatre on the South Bank (see Hewison 1986: 211–220). This political consensus, along with the adventurous architecture ensured that, as we saw in Chapter 3, the space of the South Bank remained a site for the avant-garde and artistic experimentation and its inclusion on the map as part of 'The Scene' again serves to underline some of the Angry origins of the swinging scene.

The corporate sector residing in The City would take some time to acquire a taste for this suddenly frivolous city however and is conspicuous by its absence on the map. The map itself is orientated further westwards so excluding the financial services sector. Changes in the power structures in the whole of British society seemed to cause the heart of London to shift westwards: 'London's heart has come to rest somewhere in Mayfair, between the green fields and orators of Hyde Park and the impish statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus'. The financial boom and associated property boom might well have fuelled the emergence of this decadent and swinging city, but it is also absent from many representations of Swinging London. When it does appear it is often in the form of a stuffily comic caricature of a banker. In the *Time* account for instance the image of the city appears in the shape of a photograph of a stereotypically bowler hated city gent walking across London Bridge. The picture is captioned: 'Bowler? Firmly set. Paper? Neatly folded. Brolly? Furled. Framed by Tower Bridge, the archetypal Britain strides forward to manage the affairs of a suddenly frivolous city'.

Constructing Swinging London

Many representations of Swinging London, especially those it seems aimed at the American market, emphasise the physical transformation that the city was undergoing. *Time* is no exception. We learn from the feature for instance of the various new buildings and schemes to revamp older buildings because even 'the physical city seems to shift and change under the impetus of the new activity'. London was changing in vertical extent – visually it was becoming a more American city: 'Once a horizontal city with a skyline dominated by Mary Poppins' chimney pots, London is now shot-through with skyscrapers'. The Swingers who were transforming the image of the city of London were presented as integral to this physical transformation, embracing the modernist changes in the city's skyline. A tourist advert appears later in the magazine. It features two juxtaposed photographs of hotels, on the left hand side a traditional sixteenth-century half-timbered inn is picture, and on the right is the image of a modern and modernist,

high tech hotel. The full page advert is strap-lined 'Come to Britain – ancient and Mod' and the text urges visitors to experience two sides of a new Britain because 'the lovely past and the lively present make a new kind of excitement in today's Britain'.

In the early 1960s, professional geographers and planners were also heralding a London renaissance. By 1962, London employed more than one fifth of the nation's working population, and, although this caused problems in terms of congestion and deteriorating lifestyles, futuristic planning it was hoped could mitigate the effects of uncoordinated growth (Coppock 1964). In *London 2000* (1962) Peter Hall reclaims the value of metropolitan life and the national importance of a powerful and innovative city (after Lewis Mumford). It seemed that the Swingers would oblige his vision. Like Second Empire Paris, London was undergoing a transformation in morphology that reflected and reinforced changes in society and the assertion of individuality. Unlike Paris, the changes to the London skyline were characteristically late modern – de-industrialised and reliant upon a restructured financial centre.

The planned transformation of London's cityscape during the immediate post-war period was based upon principles set out in the last years of the Second World War and established in two key documents: *The County of London Plan* (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943) and *The Greater London Plan* (Abercrombie 1944). As grand and ambitious as some of the visions were in these publications, at heart they were pragmatic and mindful of tradition and 'may be likened to the grafting of a new vigorous growth upon the old stock of London' (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943: 3). Nevertheless together, these plans represent the first moment since the great fire of 1666 that London as a whole had an established planning vision. But it was not large scale public works or grand, centrally coordinated clearance and redevelopment schemes that transformed London in the post-war period. Rather, speculative commercial development aided by a decade of relaxed building controls introduced by the Conservative government in 1954 had the greater impact on the city during the 1950s and early 1960s.

The extent to which London was physically transformed in the years between the end of the second world war and the date London was supposed to have begun to swing – around the mid-1960s – is probably overstated in many contemporaneous accounts of Swinging London. Christopher Booker in *The Neophiliacs* (1970) for instance comments upon the 'Visual Violence' that newly constructed monoliths that presented themselves to his fictional ten year absent visitor to London. These were only the first of a number of modernist shocks which would have presented themselves to him: As he flew into the new London Airport or drove in on the recently completed M4, he would have been struck by the 'new glass and concrete blocks breaking the skyline … enough to alter the scale of central London … Older, smaller buildings beginning to look like toys' (Booker 1970: 274). Next, the alienating experience of the West End would await him, the harshness of the bright colours and the space-age garb of its youthful inhabitants …

For sure the skyline of London did undergo some significant changes as the result of a building and property booms which peaked in the 1960s. These

Figure 4.3   The Shell Centre on the South Bank, constructed in 1961
Source: Wikimedia.

booms were the result of the confluence of three factors. The first of these were
the reconstruction efforts directed towards ameliorating the effect of bombing
during the Second World War. The Blitz, doodlebug and V2 bombardment had
destroyed and caused significant damage to around one third of the city, much
of it affecting London's older infrastructures. Secondly, the booms were also a
result of an upturn in the economy in particular driven by a growth in banking,
finance, insurance and commodity trading. Thirdly, the legislative landscape had
changed with the relaxation of building and rent controls which established an
environment in which new infrastructure could flourish. In the early 1960s there
were a handful of significant new buildings scattered throughout the city such as
Millbank Tower, Centre Point, the Shell Centre on the South Bank (see Figure
4.3), the Bowater House in Knightsbridge, Castrol House, the tallest of them all,
the GPO Tower (see Figure 4.4), and the Thorn House in Upper St Martins Lane.
Whilst these are not insignificant the real impact of 1960s building boom in terms
of architectural and morphological impact began in earnest in the second half of

**Figure 4.4   The GPO tower completed in 1964 and pictured in 1966, the
               tallest building in 1960s London**

Source: geograph.org.uk © Christine Matthews.

the decade. Perhaps then accounts of Swinging London reflect a shock of the new more than any significant transformation of the cityscape. The juxtaposition of tall glass, steel and concrete towers with quite dowdy, bomb damaged neighbours is probably what struck those who wrote about the social transformation of the city in the early 1960s. New buildings, however few and far between were symbols of 'aspiration and renewal' (Hewison 1986: 56).

Scenes and Projections

The *Time* piece can also be located within an established geography of representation in the city and one upon which the counterculture would later also build. The West End had long been the space from which the city was mediated, where imaginations of the city were produced and from which they were projected. In turn

those imaginations and projections played back onto the city and shape its palpable space. This geography of representation can probably be traced to regency London where indeed one can also find many parallels to a decadent Swinging London. It was through John Nash's comprehensive re-planning of the city that the West End became secured as an opulent and affluent district (see Prince 1964: 102–103). In this phase of modernity, the Regency Parks combined with new terraces creating the 'peak of residential prestige' and simultaneously creating 'democratic' space with the removal of toll gates and barriers to public access (see Atkins 1993). Concurrent with this physical redevelopment was a development in the communication industries of the city with an expansion of the printing industry concentrated in the West End. From this base the metropolis began to reinvent itself: Accounts of fashionable London, literary London and slum London became topics of great currency (Butler 1992: 189). In these accounts the West End was counterpointed with the slums and their attendant subcultures. In the meantime, west London became a distinct entity as a centre of bespoke production and skilled, unionised artisans who were part of an emergent radical culture in the city (see Green 1991: 20–21, Dickinson 1992). Just like Swinging London this voyeuristic interest in the changing social fabric of the city was mediated by the West End. During the post-war period the West End's role in the representation of the city was further consolidated with the agglomeration of media and advertising industries helping to project London as the centre of national and international flows of capital and culture.

The five West End 'scenes' that are located in the *Time* article illustrate a combination of old and new, tradition and modernity, American and English. 'Scene' is a term that the *Time* researchers found in regular use amongst the teenagers in the city, along with 'super', 'fab', 'groovy', 'gear', 'close' and 'with it'. And, like the imagination of Swinging London as it is presented in the feature as a whole, a 'scene' denoted not just a place but a time to be in that place. Scene one in Berkeley Square involves observing a young aristocrat losing a great deal of money at a private members club following an after-theatre supper at the discothèque Annabel's; Scene two is a Saturday afternoon in Chelsea browsing the boutiques in the King's Road after a morning spent in Portobello Road market; Scene three is an alternative Saturday in Chelsea spent hobnobbing with actors Terence Stamp and Michael Caine, award winning hairdresser Vidal Sassoon and tailor to the stars Doug Hayward discussing the evils of Apartheid and switching allegiance from Chelsea to Fulham because the former were a 'joke team'; Scene four is at Robert Fraser's art gallery in Mayfair with a society hostess and finishing up with an evening down the road at Dolly's discothèque dancing to the sound of the Rolling Stones, The Who and Cilla Black; Scene five is a film star and filmmakers' party in Kensington with a distinctly transatlantic feel.

These scenes, each a blend of 'flash' American influences and 'robust' old English which lined the 'slapdash' comedy of film directors like Tony Richardson and Karel Reisz, are set out as a movie storyboard in the feature. And the city was apparently swarming with production crews: 'This spring, film makers from all over the world have been attracted to London by its swinging film industry'.

The films in production in the city at this time were varied, from *Fahrenheit 451* to *The Dirty Dozen*, but there were other movies that celebrated the kinds of transformations that *Time* was remarking upon too and the brief emergence of a Swinging London style of movie.

Whilst booms in the property market produced new monoliths in the city, the cinematic representation of that space underwent a minor renaissance in the early 1960s. Movies from the full range of genres were produced from and in London during the 1960s and by 1965 most major Hollywood studies had established production facilities in London (Murphy 1986). It is certainly not coincidental that this influx of production capital and capacity occurred around the same time as a shift in the representational register of British made movies which moved from focusing upon the provincial and real to the metropolitan and fantastic. The late 1950s and early 1960s had seen the production of gritty realist movies set in provincial towns and cities in working class neighbourhoods dealing with everyday hardships and often relatively explicit in terms of sexuality and violence. This New Wave of realist cinema was frequently based upon adaptations of Angry writing discussed in Chapter 2: *Room at the Top* (1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *A Kind of Loving* (1962) for instance. It is easy to argue that these New Wave movies, in dealing with and representing hitherto taboo subjects, broke the ground upon which later London-based and more 'swinging' movies would build, but more significant for this geographical account of the swinging city is the fact that the cinema industry is one example of the way in which London appropriated the provincial renaissance and reasserted itself as both arbiter and touchstone of British cultural production.

For sure the trend towards the spatial concentration of movie industry capital in London is one reason for this trend: it was cheaper and more efficient to film subjects close at hand especially if they are considered exciting and sexy as London was in the early 1960s. But another explanation is evident in the New Wave Angry movies themselves. It is notable that the cinematic versions of Angry tales place far more emphasis on the fatalistic aspects of the Angry aesthetic than their literary counterparts: portrayed in the character of Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, or in Billy in *Billy Liar* (1963) are protagonists diametrically opposed to their parents, wilfully and obstinately negating their values, whereas the literary versions of these characters are afforded more complex and nuanced relationships with their parents. The parents are portrayed as one aspect of a stifling environment and one gets the impression that the protagonists of Angry cinema are more trapped than their literary counterparts, longing to escape the drudgery of their provincial existence and be somewhere or be somebody more exciting. In the movies, then, the Angry dream of escaping from their provincial prisons to the big city and, in most cases, the eventual failure to do so is a characteristic that seems to be given greater significance.

The shift in cinematic focus to the metropolis that occurred around 1965 was accompanied by a related shift in aesthetics and the nature of representation. We move from the representation of gritty, problematic northern realism to the

representation of dreamlike fantasies played out in front of a cityscape as stage set in which the key players were the young. But it is difficult to sustain an argument that what replaces social realist New Wave movies could in any way be considered a 'genre' or critical category: movies of early 1960s London such as *Catch Us If You Can* (1965), *Darling* (1965), *The Knack* (1965) and so on are difficult to classify together, aesthetically at least. This is perhaps why they tended to fail to impress the critics in the way that the New Wave movies had: Swinging London movies were too frivolous and ephemeral to warrant serious critical attention. These movies were very much of their time, a time as we have already seen, of dreamlike unreality and anarchic change. They replaced the brooding looks to the middle distance characteristic of social realist films with direct to camera narratives of fantasy or *sotto voce* asides. Violence was replaced with slapstick and spatially and temporally linear narratives abandoned in favour of anarchic action that was often literally fast forwarded:

> Sober realism and earnest social comment gave way to fantasy, extravaganza and escapism; black-and-white photography and Northern locations to colour and the lure of the metropolis; puritanical self-discipline to hedonistic self-indulgence; plain truthful settings to flamboyant, unrealistic decorativeness. Films became locked in a heady spiral of mounting extravagance, febrile excitement and faddish innovation. (Aldgate and Richards 1999: 216–217)

In her work on the cinematic city of Swinging London, whilst not defining a common aesthetic to movies of the period, Maria da Costa does propose that there are commonalities. The first, as we have already mentioned is their fantastical nature which, albeit varied in its extent, is present in most Swinging London movies. The second is the way in which the swinging cityscape itself becomes a character in the narrative of the movie often in the opening sequences. This is more than a ploy to geographically coordinate the narrative of the movie and place characters into context. Rather, the physical presence of the city is presented, either literally through an opening shot or through narration as 'swinging'. In *Smashing Time* (1967) for instance Yvonne (Lynn Redgrave) and Brenda (Rita Tushingham) discuss their excitement and expectation of arriving from northern England in a city that is swinging. In both *Georgy Girl* (1966) and *Darling* the opening scene is of the protagonist walking jauntily through the streets in a 'swinging' manner more recently parodied by Mike Myers in *Austin Powers*. In short, the *image* of mid-1960s London is a central character is these movies and it is to this imagination of London that the characters relate to and interact (Costa 2000).

In terms of cityscape, the London that finds its way onto the screens in these movies is rarely of concrete and glass high modernity, although the new modernist landmarks do sometimes feature. The overriding impression is then of a quite drab and shabby urban landscape which has led some to conclude when considering in addition the portrayal of new moralities, that there are more obvious connections to the New Wave than previously acknowledged (Church Gibson 2006). By far the

most prevalent impression of the London cityscape in Swinging London movies is of a stage set dressed in a pop style, of existing infrastructure adorned with colourful signs such as the colourful boutiques of the Kings Road and Carnaby Street. The overriding impression is of a Pop Art collage, or more accurately an animated and speeded-up Pop Art collage. If stasis and fixity dominate the preceding generation of films in the New Wave genre then movement is the *liet motif* of films made of and about London in the first half of the 1960s. This was most commonly represented through car or motorbike journeys through the city but also of course in the swinging swagger through the streets by various characters.

Swinging London's Discontents

> So that's why, when the teenage thing began to seem to me to fall into the hands
> of exhibitionists and moneylenders, I cut out gradually from the kiddo water-
> holes, and made it for the bars, and clubs, and concerts where the older numbers
> of the jazz world gathered. (MacInnes 1972: 58)

The *Time* feature was very quickly followed by similar pieces in the American magazines *Esquire* and *Life* which regurgitated similar celebratory versions of London 'the only true modern city'. The inevitable backlash in response to these fantastical versions of London was also swift but did not emerge from American publications, rather from British-based media outlets. London-based *Private Eye* satirised the spate of articles that appeared in 1966 in a humour tinged with *Private Eye*'s trademark anti-American Little-Englandism, produced its own version to help the small number of 'American periodicals which have not yet produced their twenty-four page survey' of Swinging London. Again from Britain, *Queen* magazine ran a special feature 'Swingeing London: The Truth' which featured a cartoon by John Galshan depicting two dockers standing in the archway which framed the East end dockyard empty of ships due to industrial action by seaman. One of the dockers is reading an account of Swinging London and exclaiming to his companion: 'I think it's TERRIBLY EXCITING – Britain, the fashion capital of the world … swingy little boutiques springing up everywhere … groups and things' (*Queen* 1966: 41).

Clearly *Time*'s and other representations of early to mid-1960s London were exaggerations. They focused upon one aspect of the social and cultural revolution that they themselves proclaimed – the spectacular and therefore the ripe for mockery and derision. But this caricature of the city glosses over what perhaps Piri Halasz's had originally intended for the feature – to suggest that there was something quite serious and profound about the swinging city, its lifestyle and aesthetics. The counterculture that emerged in the latter half of the 1960s in the city would appear completely antithetical to a swinging style that was characterised by ideals of a new aristocracy chosen on the grounds of merit, whose talents for design and innovation produced a seemingly endless supply of new products and images, a consumer myth in other words. However, as the next few chapters demonstrate, whilst the

counterculture, the group most associated with the social revolution in the mid to late 1960s in London, would certainly distance themselves form the materialistic decadence of the swinging scene, they share common roots and ideas.

Already when the *Time* feature was published this other aspect of 1960s London was appearing. *International Times*, the first underground publication in Britain would go on sale in October 1966 and although declaring itself a 'swinging paper', it came to serve a more politically and culturally radical community than the shops of the Kings Road. One year prior to the article the Albert Hall, marked on *Time*'s map of the Scene, hosted the first multi-media environmental happening in Britain, starring the American Beat poet Allen Ginsberg. The Albert Hall happening is widely recognised as a key moment in the birth of the counterculture in London. Apart from Ginsberg, British based avant-garde poets and performance artists also performed; Jeff Nuttall, journalist/poet and jazz musician for instance painted himself blue and finished the evening in a life-saving hot bath; psychiatrist R.D. Laing brought along a number of disturbed mental hospital patients; the box office takings for the evening mysteriously disappeared and no one got paid (see Nuttall 1968). This kind of freewheeling anarchy is of a distinctly different brand to the slapstick anarchy portrayed in popular representations of Swinging London at the time.

One year later in the summer of 1967 and as a result of a range of these activities the old version of Swinging London appears to have disappeared. Countercultural London literally blossomed in the first summer of love. There was apparently an almost wholesale rejection of swinging materialism and commercialism: the soft drug subculture flourished, new underground publications were launched and various countercultural institutions established adding cohesion to a growing and globalised network. Over the next few years countercultural London evolved and fragmented into a series of interest groups with differing ideas and philosophies. It would be easy to see this as something entirely alterative to what preceded it in the Swinging London of the first half of the decade, but the two 'scenes' are more much more closely connected than previously acknowledged. Elizabeth Nelson in her account of countercultural London, *The British Counterculture* (1989) for instance connects the two Londons by noting that the swinging scene gave an 'impetus to the widely accepted view of the "permissive" society'. The club scene that was established in the early part of the decade she notes was also important in providing social networks, made up of apparently classless, free flowing interactions. Nevertheless, the whole swinging scene was to become 'outmoded, and by 1967… patently a thing of the past' (Nelson 1989: 44). But the connections run deeper than Elizabeth Nelson acknowledges here and they are not simply because countercultural London emerged from the urban fabric created by Swinging London. Whilst they employed them to different ends, they emerge from the same aesthetic and theoretical roots, they share a vision.

Chapter 5
A Historical Geography
of Countercultural London

> The 'best students' are those who leave university having learnt that life is impossible outside, in the system. They are going to where the action is. Once they have abandoned the money-grubbing scum of the official Underground … there is no identity left except as part of *the class of the un-socialised*. It stretches from the depressive in Finsbury to the Diggers in Hyde Park … via Brixton, sheer beauty, Speed, smashed every single Saturday night. It is a class *with a future*, a class that is growing, and becoming conscious of its own despair – call it the new proletariat if it makes you feel better, or on more familiar ground (Heulsenback 1968).

The June 1965 happening in the Albert Hall was performed at the time when American journalists and news magazines were declaring London to be swinging. Of course, burning towers of books (Skoob towers), poets painted blue, Allen Ginsberg's drunken poetry reading and R.D. Laing's schizophrenic patients wandering around the stage and amongst the audience was a mobile assemblage that could be conflated with the Swinging London image. But as I noted in the last chapter this was a different event. It was probably the first moment that countercultural ideas found explicit expression and was a prelude to the kinds of cultural politics that were about to emerge in London. Billed as 'Wholly Communion' it was an *ad hoc* and last minute arrangement. The Albert Hall was booked for a fee of £450 ten days in advance of the performance when a number of people who would later play significant roles in the city's counterculture such as Barry Miles and Michael Horovitz, realised that there were quite a few Beat poets in and around the city including Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. 7,500 attended the event and many more experienced it through Peter Whitehead's award winning documentary film *Wholly Communion* (1965). But by many accounts it was as a member of the audience that the best experience was to be had and it was the impressive size of the audience and the rapidity with which the happening sold out that sets Wholly Communion out as the foundation for the kinds of cultural politics that shaped the city over the next ten years and are the subject of the next four chapters.

This chapter focuses upon the history of countercultural London in the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s. In it the broad character of the city's counterculture is defined – as far as it is possible to pin down such an amorphous and factionalised movement – and some of the key events are discussed. The tensions and similarities between the two broad factions of London's counterculture, the

radical left and the more 'popular' or 'hippy' underground are also covered. For the leftist factions such as student radicals the rejection of Swinging London and all that it stood for in terms of materialism and conspicuous consumption was a defining trait. The popular factions of London's counterculture on the other hand were motivated by developing innovative modes of politicking that probably connect more closely to the events at the Albert Hall in June 1965.

London and the Global Underground

> Every day people pour into London to find out what is happening there. They have been told attractive stories – young, swinging, on the move, etc. – and they're keen for a taste. Frequently they are disappointed (McGrath, 1966: 1)

Swinging London, its colour, flippancy and lack of depth, at least in its imagination and representation, probably still informs the dominant perception of what 1960s London was like. In the hands of its youthful and affluent population however London became a very different place in the second half of the decade to that which we have so far encountered. Now the city was subject to a new phase of cultural globalisation which was mediated not so much by dominant forms of media, movies, magazines and so on, as by new and alternative media. A global countercultural network became established largely through the efforts of underground press editors and journalists through the establishment of the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS). In Britain the focus of that network was primarily London which not only had the main underground press titles, but also, building upon the now established reputation of the city as the site of avant-garde expression and lifestyle, was also the main centre of countercultural living the country. UPS members were committed to sending a copy of each issue to the Syndicate. The UPS acted as a clearing service for articles so it is not unusual to find the same article appearing in several papers across the globe. Their original intention was to facilitate the transmission of news, features and advertising between what one UPS organiser termed 'anti-Establishment, avant-garde, New Left, youth oriented periodicals which share common aims and interests' (Hopkins 1968: 12). UPS members were free to use each other's material without copyright charges: 'Copyright is property, and property is capitalism ... Once you step outside copyright, you're a media outlaw' (Anon 1970: 2). It was this relinquishing of copyrights which probably explains the UPS's longevity in the face of the demise of a number of smaller countercultural agencies throughout the period. In the United States, this 'powerful mixture of media and communism' had taken the underground press circulation from nothing in 1964 to 50,000 in 1966, 2 million in 1968 and 6 million in 1970 (Hopkins 1968: 12). Comparable and reliable figures for the UK are not available but it must be borne in mind that the pass-on readership for each issue was high partly because the cost of individual issues was relatively high and the income of the readership relatively low.

From all of the underground factions and organisations, it was perhaps the UPS which best exemplifies the self-consciously global outlook of the western counterculture, but also, how well coordinated financially and politically, the underground press were. The UPS was established in 1966 at a secret meeting in San Francisco by the editors of six radical newspapers, *The San Francisco Oracle*, *The East Village Other* (New York), *The Paper* (Michigan), *The Los Angeles Free Press*, *The Berkeley Barb*, and *The Fifth Estate* (Detroit). Also present at the meeting were several countercultural celebrities including Chet Helms of The Family Dog. From the initial membership of six, the syndicate grew to its height in 1970, with over 200 publications and many irregular papers.

The Syndicate also provided a general information service on the underground press, issuing a directory containing advertising rates, subscription and wholesale prices, as well as offering introductory samples of magazines in the organisation. Later, the Syndicate would transfer its archives onto micro-film which many research libraries in the United States still carry. Initially, the UPS was coordinated by Walter Bowart, a surrealist artist and founder of the *East Village Other*. Other coordinators were Rob Rudnick, a pioneer of high energy revolution radio in New York, Detroit and Chicago, and John Wilcock, originally the *Village Voice* editor and author of a regular column 'Other Scenes', reproduced by many syndicated papers. As the UPS grew, the role of the single coordinator was replaced by a five-person coordinating committee spread throughout the United States but retaining a central office in Phoenix, Arizona originally set up by Tom Forcade. The Syndicate was later able to support the employment of a full-time public relations representative for the underground press who served as a publicity agent and coordinated the organisation of conferences. For the *Los Angeles Free Press* editor Art Kunkin, whilst initially these conferences had a radical perspective, they 'became more of an advertising meeting like conventional media gatherings' (personal communication)

This global media network in which London was a key node helped shape the reimagination of London in the late 1960s. It also forced developments and innovations through in rapid succession. It is remarkable how swiftly countercultural London changed and shifted emphasis in the few short years of its existence – which for our purposes is late 1966 to early 1974. Of course the forms in which the 1960s counterculture practiced its cultural politics did depend upon the space from which they emerged, but the existence of a global, subterranean communication network meant that ideas and practices could flow relatively easily between different urban enclaves. Throughout most of the period, excepting the peak of continental student radical activity of mid-1968, the traffic of ideas was mostly transatlantic but by no means one way. London's counterculture then, like those of most other Western cities had a character and ecology of its own which was the result of a dialogue between transnational developments and more local discourses and practices of dissent and representation. London's counterculture developed a character that can be broadly summarised as a self-consciously playful cultural politics that tended to elude conventional political categorisation and differed markedly for instance from

the Situationist influenced Parisian underground or the largely socialist inspired counterculture of Los Angeles (Rycroft 1998). This is not however to imply that the London scene was coherent: all of the various countercultural factions were represented in the city at some time during the late 1950s and early 1960s and there was a continued ideological dispute between two broad factions throughout the time, those from the austere revolutionary left and those from the more playful, popular or 'official' underground.

International Times

After the Albert Hall Happening, the next key moment in the emergence of the counterculture in London was the birth of the city's first widely circulated and self proclaimed 'underground' paper, *International Times* (later '*IT*' in response to legal action from the London *Times*). Prior to the *International Times* London had

Figure 5.1   The first edition of *International Times*. The 'It Girl' logo remained throughout the paper's run
Source: © *IT* with thanks to www.international-times.org.uk.

radical papers like *Peace News* and small scale avant-garde publications, such as Jeff Nuttall's *My Own Mag*. The story of *International Times* is worth telling here because it helps illustrate the significance of its emergence to the countercultural history of London, the extent to which underground publications from their inception were involved in a range of countercultural institutions and practices in the city, and the way in which different lines of thought and practice in terms of cultural politics ebbed and flowed throughout the period. The *International Times* was set up as an alternative to the only radical political newspaper in the city, *Peace News*, in the process, poaching some of their staff. Initially, the newspaper was financed by Jim Haynes's book shop, Love Books and with a £500 loan procured by Haynes in Paris. Haynes, now famous for his open invitation Sunday dinner parties in Paris, had arrived in Swinging London from Edinburgh in the same year. Haynes established *International Times* with four other swinging Londoners: owner of the Indica Gallery and later also bookshop Barry Miles; photographer and journalist John Hopkins (aka Hoppy); journalist Jack Moore; and accountant to the counterculture, Michael Henshaw.

The lack of coherence to countercultural London's cultural politics was complicated by the ways in which different publications reflected changing ideological fashions throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. There was it seems, an insatiable appetite for new images, ways of seeing and modes of expression, which were satisfied by publications' shifting format, style and content. While not so marked amongst papers of the New Left, or student radicals, publications catering to the majority of countercultural consumers regularly mutated in response to developments within and beyond the city. The *International Times* went through a series of metamorphoses mirroring and impacting the changes to the fabric of underground London: Beginning in October 1966 as a 'hangover from *Peace News*, ... suddenly we were into a psychedelic summer … It went from that very open, friendly, believing thing, which didn't last very long, maybe a year or so, to become more and more political' (Butler 1972: 18). *IT*'s original function was very much part of the swinging scene, wanting to 'keep things swinging for ever and ever' and to take few risks in terms of presenting radical, anti-materialist cultural politics (Stansill and Mairowitz 1971). In later manifestations, as dominant groups in the city's underground emerged and then subsided, *IT* shifted emphasis on several occasions.

IT's October 1966 fancy dress launch party at the former locomotive maintenance shed the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm is recognised, like the Albert Hall happening, as one of the defining moments of countercultural London. Billed as a 'Pop/Op/Costume/Masque/Fantasy-Loon/Blowout/Drag Ball' and costing 10 shillings at the door, the party received over 2,000 guests, including Swinging London luminaries Paul McCartney and Marianne Faithful. The participants witnessed one of the first multi-media performances by Pink Floyd who were paid £15 for the night and whose primitive lightshow blew the 13-Amp power supply (Stansill 2006). Other performers included the Soft Machine and Yoko Ono. The gathering of alternative journalists, members of the pop establishment, avant-garde

artists and performers and radical intellectuals at the *IT* launch party was a cross-section of underground London as it would emerge over the next few years. This then was not the underground of the New Left activist, but the playful, 'official' underground as the tone of the publicity literature suggested:

> All night rave to launch International Times, with the Soft Machine, Pink Floyd, steel bands, strips, trips, happenings, movies. Bring your own poison and flowers & gas filled balloons & submarines & rocket ships & candy & striped boxes & ladders & paint & flutes & feet & ladders & locomotives & madness & autumn & blow lamps.

For its first year of production, *International Times* was produced from the basement of Barry Miles' Indica book shop, which sold Beat literature, specialist underground magazines and records from the United States. The first seven issues were by no means radical in appearance: they were printed by the old hot metal process because London at this time had very few willing offset lithography print shops, and they focused mostly upon covering a range of avant-garde cultural events and performances in the city with only occasional coverage of the wider political issues normally associated with the counterculture. Through its editorial staff, the paper drew together numerous cultural 'scenes' in London. Barry Miles was involved with a series of groups in the city: with music, through his association with Paul McCartney who helped launch Indica; poetry through Allen Ginsberg; and politics through CND. The content of the first issues reflected the same eclecticism as the launch party. Articles appeared by and about figures as disparate as William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Jean Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell: 'In *IT* the rock scene, the literary scene and the art scene were all tied up', even attracting some of the 'Bloomsbury people' (Drummer 1974: 10).

Tom McGrath, ex of *Peace News* and the founding editor of *International Times* was concerned with the way that current alternative papers tended to impose overbearing moral codes upon their liberal readership and wanted to give voice to the 'sinners', figures like the existential psychotherapist R.D. Laing and poet and novelist Alexander Trocchi, both of whom were involved with the 1965 Albert Hall happening. Always intended as an international newspaper, the first year of publication did not project an inspiring image becoming labelled throughout its run 'a great missed opportunity' (Green 1988: 210). McGrath accepted the criticism that the paper did not go far enough in these initial stages, stating that 'this time and place of operations, London 1967, is not ready for a completely flipped out "newspaper"' (McGrath 1967: 2). Some concessions had to be made to the establishment not to mention the law in order to survive. Nor did *IT* cover much news about London in this first year except in the listings section at the back of the paper, one of *IT*'s 'key selling points for the future' (Fountain 1988: 30). Indeed *IT* cornered the London market for countercultural classifieds which, along

with the relatively cheaper printing costs in comparison to other more graphically adventurous publications, helps explain its longevity.

Distribution was always problematic and resulted in the decidedly shaky financial position of the paper especially in the first year when sales never exceeded 10,000 copies. WH Smiths, the major high street newsagent then and now, refused to stock the paper and instead street sellers and smaller (and willing) independent newsagents were the primary mode of distribution. Paul McCartney, through his association with Barry Miles, regularly funded print runs of *IT* in the early years. As the publication established a regular readership however, and in order to become financially independent, *IT*, more than any other paper, was involved in a series of ventures in London's underground economy. These included part ownership of the underground press distribution service in the city, ECAL (Effective Communication Arts Ltd.) and an (literally and figuratively) underground rock club (UFO) in the Irish dance hall on Tottenham Court Road, the Blarney Club. UFO showcased new psychedelic bands and instigated the first lightshow in London (Green 1988: 131–137, see Chapter 8). Through these ventures *IT* became a powerful and influential institution which effectively defined the alternative scene in London.

By 1967 *IT* had moved out of Indica's basement and into Covent Garden at Betterton Street, shifting emphasis and celebrating the drug subculture by, for instance, providing its readership with quasi-mystical accounts of a variety of new sacraments. At this time, one of *IT*'s key staff members, John Hopkins (then editor) returned after serving a nine month sentence for possession. Hopkins instigated a wide-ranging survey into the paper's readership and began a reassessment of its function in the community so that it could become 'an even more valuable addition to the scene than it already was' (Miles 1968: 24). It is not clear what the results of this survey were, but reflecting changes in the political atmosphere of the city's underground, in 1968 *IT* was involved in funding the activities of Michael Abdul Malik (Michael X), embracing the British version of Black Power and the Nation of Islam. This support would continue until Michael X fled the country at the end of the year. *IT* shifted emphasis again to the New Age under the influence of John Mitchell, the paper's Ley Lines and Flying Saucers correspondent, declaring itself a 'tribe' (Snyder 1968: 1–10) and promising to follow the politicisation of the hippies in America as the Yippies (a play on 'Youth International Party'). Concurrently though, *IT* was affected by the May 1968 events in Paris. Accounts of these events sit uncomfortably with features on expanded consciousness and Digger's Communes. Although *International Times* seems to shift and alter its output with the prevailing patterns in the underground, it was always perceived as more conservative than other underground publications, not as wide ranging in content or coverage of issues (see Nelson 1989: 47–48), more like a 'village scandal sheet, a parish pump' than an underground paper (Green 1988: 238). *Oz* magazine, on the other hand, best represented the mosaic of underground London with a stylistic and aesthetic change in image every two or three issues.

Peter Stansill, a former editor of *IT*, came to see this concentration on image rather than a coherent political strategy, as the main failing of underground London (Stansill 1971: 7). For him, there was a fallacy in the perception that somehow, within the underground, there existed a community bound by common interests and a natural or organic responsibility. To a certain extent, the popular underground in particular did become a media superstructure, imposed from above, ignoring the 'grass roots' from which it evolved, apparently whimsically shifting its stance. That this happened despite the efforts of new age 'Gandalfians' to 'sow the seeds of understanding' and communication in a final effort to save the world (Murray 1968a: 1) says much about the ascendancy of the medium over its content in this superstructure. But it was the revolutionary left that provided a contemporary and long running critique of the popular underground which seemed a grab-bag of ideologies and tactics and never presented coherent strategies.

The *International Times* was by no means the first underground publication for the 1960s counterculture. A number of American cities had one or two years of back issues of publications by the time *International Times* first went on sale: New York had the *East Village Other*, Los Angeles had *the Los Angeles Free Press* and San Francisco had the *San Francisco Oracle*. Although the success of these publications was certainly a proof of concept and an inspiration, the idea behind the establishment of *International Times* was not only to react to and ape these innovations. Rather, from its inception, the *International Times* recognised that London was not New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco because the cultural geography of the counterculture was significantly different. The focus of the underground press industry in terms of office and production space may well have been the West End, but their radical and avant-garde readership was scattered across the city, from as Barry Miles noted 'East End to West End, from Hampstead to Chelsea'. The goal was not to unite these scattered individuals but to connect them through the paper and ultimately to do the same thing on a global scale, linking 'New York with Amsterdam, Roma with Detroit to create an international "front"' (Miles 1967). As a collective and ostensibly leaderless organisation the *International Times*, more so than any other 1960s underground paper that I have seen, was both broad in its coverage and deliberately vague or non-committal in its ideological outlook – news from all countercultural factions would be given space and equality of treatment on the pages of the paper. Apart from the *IT* girl logo the *International Times* had no brand.

IT continued regular publication well into the mid 1970s but was at the height of its powers in the early years of its existence between 1967 and 1972. Throughout this time *IT* remained firmly a London-based paper with London-based content which, although by mid 1967 it was selling copies in northern cities, struggled to outsell the more traditional old left papers which dominated the market there. The dominance of London in the underground was an issue which only occasionally concerned the staff at *IT*. David Stringer, the Manchester based underground activist saw this as a classic case of London's traditional role as an appropriator and threatener of the provinces. Arguing for the centrality of Manchester to the

struggle, he urged underground London to diffuse throughout the country, because 'London can provide an arena for experiments and experience that like all other intense existential awareness may threaten to destroy its own fruits' if it does not change its environment (Stringer 1968: 3). Later in its run, *International Times* was to venture out of the city. In December 1969, *IT* 69 toured the provincial industrial cities but found very little to inspire them, particularly in Birmingham: 'To anyone ... involved with the London Underground, ... listening to someone who's taken it upon himself to be part of the vanguard of the alternative society, saying that he can't finish doing some posters as he's got to get home in time for the evening meal his mother's cooked is a little difficult to take' (Martin 1969: 7). By 1969 then, London had claimed sole ownership of avant-garde cultural production which only a decade before was something boasted by the provinces.

By all accounts the London counterculture had faded out of existence by 1974. In the early seventies the circulation of many underground papers collapsed. In the United States by 1974, five out of nine publications extant in 1968, had disappeared. In Britain by this time, all but a few had folded. Although this took place in a time of contraction in the economy, its occurrence prompted criticism about the ideological direction of the underground. These papers were only catering for an exclusive market which was easily bored, growing up faster than the publications and acquiring other concerns. Attempts were made to redefine the underground press as the Alternative/Liberal/Radical press, since they had come to cater, by virtue of the underground's size and popularity, for those in general seeking an alternative opinion on current events. It became difficult to define papers as widely read as the *Los Angeles Free Press* as 'underground' when, by the mid 1970s, you could buy them in supermarkets (DiSpoldo 1974). *IT* in fact published sporadically right through the 1970s and produced its final issue in 1986 although issues from the last ten years bear very little resemblance to those of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Revolutionary Left Verses the Underground: The Dialectics of Liberation

The Dialectics of Liberation conference held 15–30 July 1967 was the moment that London stopped swinging and got serious and marked the first significant ideological and philosophical shift in the nature of countercultural rebellion in the city. Less than one year after the exuberant and swinging *International Times* launch party defined the cultural politics for the city's countercultural community, the Roundhouse hosted the Dialectics of Liberation conference, a far more intellectually and politically earnest event. The conference marked a shift towards the left and the adoption of conventional ideological position even though figures from all countercultural factions were present and the real motivation was to establish a dialogue between all factions and to establish the grounds for individual liberation. It should however also be noted that the conference represented a moment of transformation for the left when it began to show concern

for individual as opposed to collective freedom and liberation. This was because the conference's origins lay in recent developments in radical psychiatry. The conference was organised by key figures in the newly emerged field of existential psychiatry or 'anti-psychiatry', R.D. Laing, David Cooper, Joseph Berke and Leon Redler, and attempted to demystify violence and reconcile the 'inner reality' with the 'outer reality', expanding the effect of current limited personal liberation at the 'Micro-Social' level to the 'Macro-Social' level. To this extent, the project was effectively anti-Swinging London, endeavouring to create a 'radical de-bourgeoisification of society' (Cooper 1968: 10). Many of these thoughts were echoed in the Kingsley Hall project in which both Cooper and Laing were involved and where the underground psychiatric movement was attempting to free patients from one-dimensional structures (Wallenstein 1989: 1–6).

Events in London aligned to give the Dialectics of Liberation conference greater significance. London's underground community for instance were galvanised by the occupation of the London School of Economics (LSE). The sit-ins at the LSE concerned London University's association with University College, Rhodesia after it was announced that the head of the Rhodesian college was to become the director of the LSE. The first sit-in occurred in 1966, but in January 1967, the dispute caused a minor riot and in response to subsequent disciplinary measures, students staged a nine-day sit-in in March. The city was also hosting a number of experiments in radical Agitprop theatre. And the countercultural community were exercised by the plight of Michael X. The symposium therefore attracted many more people than expected. Following it, Marxism and specifically Frankfurt School inspired structuralism became the current vogue, and was to be for the next year or so.

The conference marked the London counterculture's first sustained engagement with Herbert Marcuse and his anointment as a significant patriarch. Marcuse, who gave the lecture 'Liberation From the Affluent Society' to the conference, became popular with the counterculture because he articulated something new about the operation of hegemony and dominant structures which suggested an effective resistance needed to adopt different and as yet underdeveloped political practices. His notion of one-dimensional society, introduced briefly in Chapter 2, mellowed as a result of his experience of the revolt in the 1960s and particularly his involvement with Black Power on the West Coast of the United States. Marcuse revised some of his earlier ideas on youthful revolt expressed in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), but retained the fusion of Freudian psychology and Marxist dialectics developed in his earlier account, *Eros and Civilization* (1955) (MacIntyre 1970: 41–54, Tallack 1991: 243–250). At this stage, he was prompted to envisage some effective subversive forces able to constitute a 'Great Refusal' (Marcuse 1969a). These forces recognised the mark of social repression in even the 'most sublime manifestations of traditional culture, even the most spectacular manifestations of technical progress' (Marcuse 1969a: 11). This was the spectre of revolution, and to its young militants Marcuse dedicated his *Essay on Liberation* (1969). Theirs was a struggle for existence itself, for the 'elimination of those of [society's] features which perpetuate man's subjection to the apparatus' (Marcuse 1969a: 92). The

Figure 5.2   One of numerous articles by or about Herbert Marcuse that appeared in London's underground press. This one first appeared in a UPS affiliated New York paper and was reprinted in *International Times* 54 (11 April 1969)

Source: © *IT* with thanks to www.international-times.org.uk.

struggle for existence was a struggle against the overpowering 'linguistic universe', a universe which naturally appropriates its enemies into the routine of everyday speech and hence, can 'be transcended only in action' (Marcuse 1969a: 79): As he told the countercultural audience at the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation Conference in London, 'flowers by themselves have no power whatsoever' (Marcuse 1968: 175).

London's counterculture were adept at selecting aspects of political philosophy and ignoring less palatable ones so that even amongst the more 'hippy' of the London scene, Marcuse was, for a while at least, *de rigour*. His musings on the biological foundation of socialism for instance were curious to say the least and certainly neither hip nor swinging. Sex, he thought, displaced aggression and what he observed as permissiveness and laxity in modern society was diverting the

masses from the knowledge of their oppression and 'depleting them of energy that should be sublimated into revolutionary forms of creativity – "repressive desublimation"' (Sedgewick 1968). Despite this, as Patrick Newman's *International Times* review of Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* suggests, there was something to be salvaged: 'his many and complex ideas need careful chewing over before swallowing or spitting out as reason dictates. But he's worth getting your teeth into because, apart from his shying away of the mystical/drug side of counter-cultural thought, this book indicates just how central to hippie ideology Marcuse is' (Newman 1972: 40).

For Marcuse, individuals reproduced a continuum of repression because the technocratic society had taken root in individual existence and consciousness itself, so that a true dialectic of liberation would involve a qualitative change, 'organic, instinctual, biological changes at the same time as political and social changes' (Marcuse 1968: 184). The intelligentsia, that is, the young middle-class radicals, for Marcuse were the only group capable of this new transcending awareness. By virtue of their privileged position they had the tools to 'pierce the ideological and material veil of mass communication and indoctrination' (Marcuse 1968: 187). Indoctrination in servitude would be confronted in this way by indoctrination in freedom, a therapeutic task ideally suited to those in a position of power within the productive base itself, the intelligentsia. These new movements had set themselves the task of reformulating the expression of existence, and it was their apparent success to date that inspired Marcuse in the last few years of the 1960s. As he involved himself with some of America's most radical countercultural organisations – The Weathermen and the Black Panthers for instance – Marcuse's position was one of an honorary youngster, allowed to pontificate on the nature and future of the movement. At numerous gatherings throughout the United States and occasionally in Britain, he stressed the need for a rejection of traditional organisation, charging the left to 'arouse the consciousness and conscience of others', to break out of the 'language and behaviour patterns of the corrupt political universe' and to activate a philosophy of 'organised spontaneity' (Marcuse 1969b).

R.D. Laing and the Countercultural Self

R.D. Laing, the co-convenor of the Dialectics of Liberation conference was concerned with the ways in which one could break one-dimensional consciousness. Laing was working through the experiential and psychological effects of technocratic alienation building especially upon Marcuse's Marxist–Freudian rendering of one-dimensional society. 'Civilization' Laing thought, repressed not only the instincts of, but also the transcendent forces within the individual so that anyone with experience of other dimensions in this environment, such as the schizophrenic, ran the risk of being destroyed by one-dimensional society. Technocratic rationalism imposed and sustained the meanings of normality, sanity, freedom and the other. Any perspective not grounded in this frame of reference spoke an entirely different language according to different semiotic rules. A common Marcuse inspired

emphasis to ideas about technocracy and its pervasiveness and depth of influence during the early 1960s suggested that consciousness itself was constrained by the technocratic order. Laing however developed an optimistic understanding of human subjectivity. At the heart of his understanding was a tension within the identity of the self. That tension arose because self identity was two-dimensional, a conjunction of self identity for others and self identity for oneself, with the former 'false self' relating to objective existence, and the latter, 'true self' concerning subjective existence. One-dimensional society demanded a balance between the two, a separation of the universes of consciousness and action (Laing 1970: 94–105). 'Action' here refers to the objective self, that is, the self that re-presents itself to, conforms to and moves in rhythm with the demands of the outside world. By the subjective self, Laing was referring to the inner, or transcendental self which unlike Marcuse, he felt could never be trapped or possessed by the objective world. To be human relied upon this form of two-dimensional identity, for if the subject 'does not exist objectively as well as subjectively, but has only subjective identity, an identity-for-himself [sic], he cannot be real' (Laing 1970: 95). But these two forms of self existed in dialectic in the individual and whenever that dialectic broke down and the two were either held apart or merged, psychosis resulted. Occupying both forms of self in an 'ambiguous transitional position between 'me' and the world' (Laing 1970: 131) was the body – acting as the centre of the self but also as an object for others to sense. In this transitional role, the body played an important part in Laing's comprehension of human subjectivities.

For Laing, there were two types of person, 'embodied' and 'unembodied'. The embodied individual had a full sense of being biologically alive, of being real, and in such a person bodily experience, through action and interaction with other human beings, was the base from which they defined themselves as a person. For the unembodied individual the opposite held and the body 'is felt more as one object among other objects in the world rather than the core of the individual's own being' (Laing 1970: 69). In the unembodied person the body was not in both subjective and objective selves, but only in the objective or 'false' self that presents itself to the world. Whilst both modes of being could give rise to psychosis, the latter for Laing was more problematic because the unembodied person was unable to participate in aspects of life that were mediated exclusively through the body, such as gestures, actions and expressions. By extension, those in whom the body played a transitional role between subjective and objective worlds were 'balanced'.

Laing's notion of the 'inner self' referred to the non-representational core of the self, the part of subjectivity that was unaffected by the demands of an objectifying and representational world. In his therapeutic practice, the individual was considered 'a situation' or social context within a hierarchical network of social contexts: 'the context of the individual at first appears as his immediate network, and the contexts of that network come into view as larger social frameworks' (Laing 1968: 20). The overarching framework was the technocratic 'total world system' to which the objective self adjusted. It was then the false self that was affected by

technocratic control, whereas the inner or true self was allowed to dream of new realities. The potential for liberation from alienation did not lie in transformations in material or social conditions, but in individual consciousness, in self-liberation. True sanity Laing once wrote, would entail the dissolution of the rational ego and the 'emergence of the "inner" archetypal mediators of divine power, and through this death a rebirth ... the eventual reestablishment of a new kind of ego functioning, the ego now being the function of the divine, no longer its betrayer' (Laing 1982: 206). This entailed a reconciliation of inner and outer selves and, beyond the self, the realisation of an Edenic paradise, an 'ontologically sufficient' home, 'where once upon a time there was no difference between man [sic] and his environment' (Gordon 1971: 51–52). Equally, this reconciliation concerned a rediscovery and reconnection of mind and body: 'we hardly know of the existence of the inner world: we barely remember our dreams, and make little sense of them when we do; as for our bodies, we retain just sufficient proprioceptive sensations to coordinate our movements and to ensure the minimal requirements for biosocial survival' (Laing 1967: 26).

To be sure, the counterculture did not fully appropriate Laing's ideas in all of their complexity, but the notions of the effect of technocratic alienation, which were shared with a number of other key thinkers for the counterculture, were of defining importance to their cultural politics (DeKoven 2003). Laing, like other patriarchs, also developed his thoughts in conjunction with the counterculture as a result of his involvement in certain key events, making it difficult to disentangle the lines of influence in each direction (Crossley 1998). But certain ideas and practices are identifiable: of central importance to a range of countercultural practices was the idea of the inner self as developed by Laing, particularly the rediscovery and performance of that self in an effort to connect inner and outer worlds. Most notoriously, of course, the exploration of inner space that this project suggested underpinned the experimentation with hallucinogens such as LSD, popular with the counterculture and used by Laing in therapeutic interventions at his Kingsley Hall centre (Crossley 1999, Laing 1972). In the same vein, the notion of an achievable paradise where humanity and nature were harmonised and where each existed in seamless co-relation was a common countercultural theme most frequently expressed in terms of a yearning for primordial or primitive social orders (Fairfield 1973, Bookchin 1990). We will see too in Chapter 9 that this notion of the self was deployed in multi-media lightshow aesthetics.

Pre-McLuhan Man

The intention at the Dialectics of Liberation symposium, then, was to reveal the importance of the numerous layers of social contexts that imposed themselves on the individual – the dialectical system through which true revolution was squashed. However, the personality of Stokeley Carmichael and not the words of the symposium's star Herbert Marcuse, received the best reception, if only because the activities Michael X were well covered in the underground press in the city at

the time. Although talking around the same issues of a 'multilateral, crippled and frustrated human existence: a human existence that is violently defending its own servitude' (Carmichael 1968: 182), Carmichael was embraced as a romantic warrior figure rather than for his revolutionary doctrine. There was however, a resultant increased support for Black Power in the city and a recognition of the importance of Black culture to the American counterculture; 'resonances which it would be quite unfair to expect from either an English or Australian counterculture' (Robin Blackburn in Green 1988: 210). For the Dutch Sigma activist Simon Vinkenoog this was where the conference failed, 'instead of demystifying [sic] human violence, the crowd cheered frenziedly at every mention of violence. Non-violent actions were booed – racism was once again affirmed [through the presence of Carmichael]' (Vinkenoog 1967). Not only was the sale of the *International Times* banned at the symposium but the pacifist book stall was told to close, indicating that rather than uniting factions of the counterculture the symposium actually tended to polarise.

Throughout 1967 that polarisation between the revolutionary left and the popular underground seemed to accentuate. This perhaps finds it best expression in London at the series of demonstrations outside the United States' embassy in Grosvenor Square, organised by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. These began in October 1967 and for a year saw increased participation and increasing violence, symbolising the shift from non-violent to violent protest. The marches went via central London to the Square and surrounded the American embassy and for Fountain (1988), were the antithesis of their joyful and carnivalesque precursors, the CND marches of the early 1960s. Initially, the majority of the participants were the students who had been involved in the university sit-ins over the previous year. It was at these demonstrations that the left managed to recruit most members from other underground factions, whilst the popular underground press seemed out of sync with the prevailing consciousness, condemning the violence and accentuating the rift between the two groups (Fountain 1988: 59–60).

In its press, the revolutionary left factions of countercultural London remained consistently puritanical in their approach towards the variety of issues which presented themselves. This perceived division remains today in the recent spate of accounts of the late 1960s. In a book review, John Lloyd, the former editor of *Ink*, a weekly alternative newspaper set up in 1970 intended to have a national circulation, described the revolutionary left's relationship to the underground press as like that of a 'leech to a vein' (Lloyd 1988: 40), whilst Tariq Ali criticised those who assume that the revolts of 1968 were more about popular culture and happy mysticism than revolutionary politics (Ali 1988). Rejecting the nihilistic and narcissistic tendencies of the popular underground, with its ignorance of revolutionary doctrine, the left, as represented by publications like, *The Hustler*, *Black Dwarf*, *Red Mole*, and the situationist *King Mob Echo* saw the 'official' underground as surplus to requirements and bourgeois: 'Kick any analysis, any paper, that isn't produced solely for specific tactical reasons. Kick them: they are the treadmill of the mind: the opium of the student' (Gray 1968: 2). For the

left, Swinging London still thrived within the popular underground, its logical progeny: 'Your Underground ends at the latest boutique wherever it started' (Quattrocchi 1970: 214). A movement which by 1970, in 'five years or so' had 'ingurgitated' 'Che Guevara, Wilhelm Reich, the Tarot cards, Jimi Hendrix, mysticism and the Albert Hall without getting an attack of Marxist diarrhoea must have a good stomach, if no teeth' (Quattrocchi 1970: 214). Excepting the King Mob activist Chris Gray perhaps, there was however some jealousy on the part of the left for the eye-catching graphics and anti-lineal media experimentation in the 'official' underground press; 'in the left, there seems to be a fear of using methods devised by Capitalist advertising mainly because it seeks to propagate unsolicited information' (Muldoon 1968a).

New Left activities and revolts like the LSE occupation were read as lineal by the popular underground, characterised by a lack of communication. Put simply, they had not grasped the rudiments of modern communication, and consequently been unable to affect the audience they wished to reach (the working-class). For Wistrich (1969) this was because they were 'not interesting people'. Instead of welcoming people to make their political frustration known, the 'sectarian Left talks the language of LINEAR PRE-McLUHAN MAN'. In conclusion, what was needed was the cross-fertilization of the underground and the New Left, a leap from 'prose to poetry' on the part of the left, '[w]e must break down the hopeless exclusive arrogance of the New Left and teach them to communicate' (Wistrich 1969). Post-Tariq Ali, the *Black Dwarf*, the most popular of the revolutionary left's papers, adopted many of these new techniques. Indeed Ali (1988) recognises some of the migrations of tactics between the two main factions of the London counterculture.

The *Black Dwarf* was founded in 1968, intending to publish the first issue in May of that year. But the staff were overtaken by events in Paris and problems with the paper's format. Conceived in an atmosphere of general discontent with what *IT* had to offer, *Black Dwarf* was intended to unite the left and the counterculture, but primarily to speak to the working-class, drawing inspiration from the dock worker's dispute and the Paris radicals. The paper's audience were the student radicals, in whom the *Black Dwarf* staff detected a 'high consciousness of a new dimension which has added to the classical alienation of labour produced by Capitalist society' (BD 1968a: 2). Students were declared the new vanguard and most of the earlier issues of the paper covered the student occupations and disputes in Britain, Europe and the United States. Based at the old New Left Review offices on Carlisle Street, the paper took its name from the nineteenth-century paper produced by the Chartists and its issue numbering followed on from the original journal beginning with volume 13. Among those initially involved with the paper were the playwright David Mercer, British Beat poet Adrian Mitchell, wealthy actor, writer and literary agent Clive Goodwin, and a number of others already established in the media. Despite input from these experienced media figures, *Black Dwarf* presented an austere image, particularly early on, with a large

broadsheet format, columns running the full length of pages, very few illustrations or photographs, nor captivating prose.

1968 saw an explosion in the output of underground papers in London and in countercultural activities generally. Within this confusing environment the *Black Dwarf* struggled for an identity and a voice amongst a mass of competing voices. Columns appeared in the paper from all factions of London's underground, '[w]hy even Richard Neville [*Oz*'s editor] wrote for *Black Dwarf*' (Fountain 1988: 69). Like all the revolutionary left factions of the counterculture, *Black Dwarf* struggled to engage with a working-class audience and was consumed mainly with and by students involved in mobilising communities in London, the sit-ins at various colleges, and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. There were also a series of ideological conflicts within the editorial board between members of the International Marxist Group like the editor Tariq Ali and those not wishing to align the paper with any specific political groupings. There was then no identifiable common front or purpose to the city's left during the late 1960s despite a series of moment and events that should perhaps have galvanised them. Ironically the one target that all factions of the left could unite to attack were their fellow undergrounders in the more popular or 'official' underground as some had come to label them.

Style without content or purpose was a perpetual criticism of the popular underground by the Left: most of the 'Underground press have little to say that they actually think or believe in. They continue to propagate a style of freedom, in which the revolutionary, the reactionary and the completely meaningless jostle side by side' (Hoyland and Nicholson 1970: 2). For some, the hippy scene was supplying a service to the left by providing alternatives to bourgeois society; 'ultimately, however, those with genuine intention will emerge as a strong minority' (Muldoon 1968b). This never happened, although undoubtedly, there were undergrounders who moved between interest groups.

Alternatively, the popular, hippy underground was more conscious of the need to be in a constant state of metamorphosis, so avoiding appropriation by the established culture: 'It is typical of the left … Either their way or no way. We need all ways. Like an organism: the more diverse it is, the more capable it is of dealing with its surroundings' (Lewallen 1970: 22). Such elusiveness, whilst denying recuperation or appropriation, also invited criticisms of nihilism, incoherence and a lack of revolutionary commitment: underground culture was a 'loose collection of attitudes, picked on because they are the opposite pole of work-panic-military Western alienation' (*Frendz* 1971: 9). In this sense, the philosophy of the popular underground can be traced back to its swinging heritage and whilst that might not make it radically left, it should not imply that it was not radical because, as we have seen, Swinging London was also avant-garde.

Conclusion

In response to an article in *IT* 78, proposing a dialogue between the left and the underground, *Black Dwarf* (Hoyland 1970: 12), accused the 'official' underground of pandering to capitalism as each of its new developments (happenings, Street Theatre, lightshows, etc.) were taken up by the New Activities Committee (NAC) of the Arts Council in their project to increase funding to fringe arts. Representing the dehumanised society, the Arts Council was seen to infringe on the new 'living as art' notions implicit to many underground activities. NAC appears to be, Hoyland said, a 'classic case' of what the Situationists called recuperation, 'the process by which the bureaucratic system attempts to absorb and neutralise any area of rebelliousness and autonomous activity which might conceivably pose a threat to it' (Hoyland 1970: 12). Nevertheless Swinging London like hippy countercultural London, for a time in the late 1960s managed to create new styles, images and practices that dated the old ones before they could be mass produced.

Despite all of this posturing there was, in hindsight, a great deal of common ground between these two broad factions of London's counterculture. It can be seen in the words of the speeches made to the Dialectics of Liberation symposium and it can be seen in the content and style of *IT*. What they shared, which is the subject of the next chapter, is a desire to formulate new modes of expression that would break perceived technocratic control of minds and bodies. And whilst the project was most thoroughly and explicitly worked though and practised by the popular underground it was also something that defined the New Left in the late 1960s.

Chapter 6

Rephrasing and Reimagining Dissent: Technology, Nature and Humanity

… listen to your present time tapes and you will begin to see who you are and what you are doing here mix yesterday in with today and hear tomorrow your future rising out of old recordings you are a programmed tape recorder to record and play back

WHO PROGRAMS YOU

WHO DECIDES WHAT TAPES TO PLAY IN PRESENT TIME

WHO PLAYS BACK YOUR OLD HUMILIATIONS AND DEFEATS HOLDING YOU IN PRE RECORDED PRESENT TIME

you don't have to listen to that sound you can program your own playback you can decide what tapes you want played back in present time study your associational patterns and find out what cues in what pre recordings for playback program those old tapes out. (Burroughs 1967: 6)

Whilst I ended the last chapter with the observation that the cultural politics of the two major factions of London's counterculture were not as different as they liked to believe and vehemently expressed, it was from the stereotypically hippy countercultural factions that the more innovative, spectacular and memorable cultural politics from the period came. This is the group who were far less conventionally 'political' in their cultural politics. They consumed and absorbed a range of closely related ideas circulating in the academy and often voiced by public intellectuals with radical pedigree, and from these expressed and shaped a cultural politics that focused upon anti-technocracy through the development of new modes of linguistic, aesthetic and performative expression (see Rycroft 2003). They were therefore certainly not anti-modern or techno-phobic in character or outlook. This chapter explores aspects of these cultural politics and moves from technocracy and subjugation to the possibilities seen by the counterculture as inherent in new modes of communication.

We begin though with another defining moment in the development of countercultural London, the *Oz* obscenity trial. Whilst by no means the longest running underground publication in London, *Oz* was its most popular and most infamous (see Chapter 7). Recounting the story of the obscenity trial here will help establish the argument that I want to make in the rest of the chapter about the drive to establish new modes of expression amongst the counterculture in London. This then was a cultural politics of style, aesthetics and gesture and one that was clearly evident in the events at the Old Bailey in the summer of 1971. *Oz* as a

publication was representative of the hippy factions of the city's counterculture
and its prosecution was much less about content than it was about style.

The Trials of *Oz*

Richard Neville, Felix Dennis and Jim Anderson the editorial team of *Oz*, were
prosecuted in June 1971 on a charge of conspiracy to corrupt and deprave the
morals of young persons, along with a variety of offences under the Obscene
Publications Act, for the publication of *Oz* 28 (May 1970), 'School Kid's *Oz*'.
Adolescents were invited to edit this special issue and given full control over

**Figure 6.1   The cover of School Kid's *Oz*. One of the many images from this
                 edition that preoccupied the obscenity trial**

Source: Underground Press; *Oz*.

its content excepting the ads section. Although if anything, this issue is visually less adventurous than others, the trial itself centred on the issue of presentation and expression and not the series of in-depth, laboured and rather dull articles on school reform. Two illustrations in particular became the images which provoked the criminal law, and on which the trial was focused: the cover, depicting several cavorting Afro-Caribbean lesbians in a variety of poses; and inside the issue, the adaptation of a Robert Crumb cartoon splicing in the head of Rupert Bear on one character: 'Mr Leary [for the prosecution] taught us in the trial, that you can read much into images' (MacInnes 1971: v). Indeed, it was the rendering of Rupert Bear with an extra-long penis that caused Rupert to emerge as 'one of the most sensational emblems of defiance and offence' (de Jongh 1991: 27). Rupert Bear, usually in the *Daily Express* cartoon strip, was ageless and seemingly incorruptible, caught in eternal childishness and innocence. That is, until he appeared penetrating a 90 year-old virgin in *Oz* 28.

For their defence, *Oz* called a series of expert witnesses, not specifically to defend the issue, so much as to explain the validity of an alternative lifestyle and particularly the way it was portrayed in *Oz*. These included George Melly, Marty Feldman, Edward De Bono and John Peel. Marsha Rowe, who was looking for expert witnesses from the older generation throughout the trial, found the *Oz* Rupert the most difficult to justify to those who had grown up with the *Daily Express*'s Rupert. Within the transcription of the *Oz* trial, this conflict in language, images, and meaning is apparent. It was the prosecution's intent, drawing on the use of four letter words in this edition, to prove the 'deliberate impoverishment of the vocabulary'. Defendants and witnesses were each asked to define terms like pornography and obscenity in order to demonstrate a lax morality (Palmer 1971: 112), and conversely, when the prosecution council attempted to adopt the parlance, the cognoscenti in the court erupted at how ridiculous it sounded from him; 'I've got the bread, can you score me some speed man' (Palmer 1971: 36). It became not simply a trial on censorship of the press, but was envisaged by underground London as an attack on their modes of expression and the imposition of a morality of when, where and how to say certain things.

Not only then, was the trial labelled as the underground verses the establishment, but it demonstrated and accentuated the clash between different modes of expression. The battle mobilised the underground's dissentient community, including a benefit record by John Lennon, 'Do the *Oz*', and an art auction complete with signed Warhol painting (Williams 1971: 5). Indeed, as Colin MacInnes remarked in *New Society* immediately after the six week trial, the public grew to feel this 'mammoth contest couldn't just be about a dirty magazine, but must be about some major principle, and reveal some major social confrontation' (MacInnes 1971: iv). London's underground community also rallied to the defendants' support, organising events, demonstrations and street theatre outside the Old Bailey. *Oz* Publications Ink produced a number of 'kitsch invitations to the trial' for the readers and set up an Obscenity Trust at Princedale Road (*Friends* 1970: 5) and established the 'Friends of *Oz*' organisation, whilst *Ink*, Neville's and
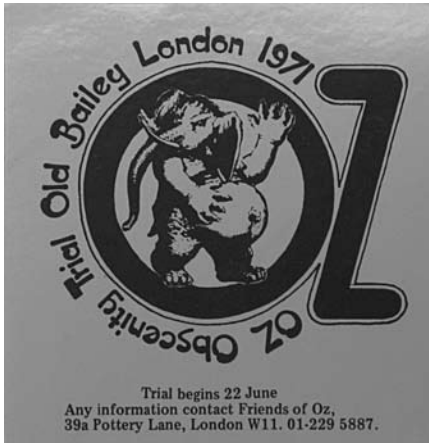
Figures 6.2, 6.3, 6.4   Two stickers and a publicity shot of the *Oz*
conspirators: A small sample of a range of material
that was included in press packs to publicise the *Oz*
trial at the Old Bailey

Source: Harvey Matusow papers, University of Sussex. Underground Press.

Dennis's latest national printing venture, covered the trial in detail, including a laborious examination of the history and application of each of the charges.

The trial was to become one of the period's most vivid articulations of the conflict between underground London and establishment London. This even captured the city's radical leftist community. For them, the trial was an important 'situation' where the system which dictated, perverted, recaptured and co-opted every step taken towards liberation, could be exposed and ridiculed. Using Laing's and Marcuse's conception of capitalist society to explain the prosecution, Dave Robins, writing in *Oz* 36 (June 1971) called for the creation of a spectacle surrounding the events of the trial, to point out the system's hypocrisy: 'we are up against a capitalist system that invades every single area of our lives', especially sexuality (Robins 1971: 13). The *Oz* trial would be the focus of a series of agitations outside the court, which would be aimed at 'exposing the system for what it is, and at the same time the practical extension of our criticisms. A festival of alternative life surrounding their legal moratorium' (Robins 1971: 13).

The defendants were acquitted on the conspiracy charge by a unanimous verdict but convicted on majority verdicts for each of the others, including sending obscene material through the post. Neville was served with a deportation order and sentenced to a total of 15 months in prison. Jim Anderson received a 12 month sentence and Felix Dennis, 9 months. Following an appeal, the verdicts were declared unsafe due to the judge's inaccurate and misleading summing up, and the sentences revoked.

What the *Oz* trial highlighted more so than any of the other defining events and moments discussed in the last chapter was the extent to which the city's counterculture had developed by the early 1970s a distinct aesthetic, linguistic and perfomative character. That character was fundamentally influenced by a range of current ideas about technocracy, subjugation and resistance that had been circulating for a few years. It is to these ideas that the counterculture gleaned from a number of patriarchs that I now want to turn.

Technocracy's Children: Developing a New Language of Dissent

Theodore Roszak, author of one of the first accounts of the counterculture, *The Making of the Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (1968) and indeed a 'partisan of the counter-culture' (Bromwich 1970: 56), theorised the contemporary social upheaval in the West as the product of a new psycho-social environment. Because of its timely appearance, its innovative interdisciplinary approach and reasonably accessible style, Roszak's account of the counterculture fed back into the shaping of the counterculture's own cultural politics almost immediately. From 1968 onwards for instance, journalists and correspondents writing for the London underground press adopted Roszak's nomenclature. His analysis, much appreciated by the more popular factions of the underground, was based on the premise that a truly alternative political solution to

a 'disorientated civilization' would arise from the legions of alienated youth and not from the revolutionary left nor the liberal-Kennedy Peace Corps. Although prolific, particularly in Europe, the militant left for Roszak, were simply the heirs of an institutionalised left wing legacy, championing the working-class and reaching out to them as allies in the struggle only to find that these 'expected alliances strangely fail to materialize ... they stood alone, isolated, a vanguard movement without a following' (Roszak 1971: 2). The other side of the counterculture broadly (though at the time not pejoratively) labelled 'hippies' were on the other hand truly politically revolutionary because they were perceived to have transcended the machine, 'escaped from a culture where the machine is god and men judge each other by mechanical standards of efficiency and usefulness' (Strait 1968: 203). Roszak then had noticed a distinctive shift in cultural politicking, one which Marcuse could not predict. The young Roszak theorised could remain childish and playful, articulating the desire for unrestricted joy, and clearly succeeding in embodying radical disaffiliation without reverting to traditional forms of political expression – a very real 'Great Refusal'. For Roszak, by 1968, the young had become 'one of the very few social levers dissent has to work with' (Roszak 1971: 41).

Roszak's was the first in a series of influential accounts of the movement most based upon technology, technocracy and consciousness many of which were focused upon the experience of the United States counterculture but through syndication via the UPS were equally important in London. Charles Reich's bestselling explanation of the counterculture's evolution *The Greening of America* (1970) also explored the dramatic shift in the discourse of dissent. Reich termed the phases of human perception of reality (or the total configuration that makes up the individual) 'consciousness'. Each consciousness was numbered according to which phase in American history that it belonged. Consciousness I represented the pioneer psyche or the foundations of the American Dream, Consciousness II, the psyche of corporate America, whilst Consciousness III was the Great Refusal of both Consciousnesses I and II, the counterculture.

The language and thought of Consciousness III, although arising from Consciousness II were so radically different that it made a virtually 'indecipherable secret code' (Reich 1971: 184). Corporate America had created an ever-widening gap between fact and rhetoric, a credibility gap that had suddenly become too much, negating the American Dream of individual freedom and liberty. Corporate America placed social controls on 'weak men' in order to prevent them from damaging themselves and their environment. A 'common taste for repression unites the controllers and the controlled within the corporate state' (Starr 1970: 49). But it was the 'bright', 'sensitive' children who succumbed to the phenomenon of 'conversion', led by an elite vanguard of those exposed to the 'very best of liberal arts education – poetry, art, theater, literature, philosophy, good conversation' (Reich 1971: 189). The content and foundation of Consciousness III was liberation from the automatic acceptance of the imperatives of society, and this rejection started with the self: 'It is a crime to allow oneself to become an instrumental being,

a projectile designed to accomplish some extrinsic end, a part of an organisation or a machine' (Reich 1971: 190). Primarily, the project of Consciousness III then was to shake off the 'false consciousness' imposed by Consciousnesses I and II, counteracting the influence of the mass-media, educational conditioning and advertising. The devices for this Great Refusal were the underground press, demonstrations, alternative living and alternative universities. For Reich, this movement sought to transcend science and technology, 'to restore them to their proper place as tools of man rather than as determinants of man's existence' (Reich 1971: 293). The movement also sought to recover elements of primeval consciousness lost in the rush for material development, a sense of oneness with the natural environment and a spiritual enlightenment.

Like Jeff Nuttall, and Charles Reich and the Beat Generation before him, Roszak saw the shadow of thermonuclear annihilation as the background of absolute evil against which the counterculture stood. The Bomb engendered, and was the ultimate expression of the ingenious rationalisation of society, economy and morality. That such 'inconceivable violence' could be committed and rationalised seemed to negate the existence of reality itself (Nuttall 1968: 135–136). This scientific intelligence could not recognise the metaphorical and mystical terminology, nor the 'province of experience in which artists and mystics claim to have found the highest values of existence' (Roszak 1971: 52). In the technocratic society, objective examination was logically opposed to instinctive experience. Even amongst the student New Left, although not willing to accept the end of ideology, Roszak identified a 'tenderness' in their politicking, and a reluctance to embrace a singular logical doctrine, bringing them closer to the hippies in a less conventional non-violent approach. Aspects of the New Left's beliefs and style seemed to denote qualitative differences with radicals of the recent past. Not the least significant of these differences was the lack of a structured political ideology which would 'dialectically outline social ills and just as pointedly dictate the method of correction' (Simmons and Winograd 1967: 131). But it was the hippies' investigation of non-intellective consciousness that captured Roszak's attention. Hippies adopted more 'civilized' religions, philosophies and heritages, particularly in those influenced by Eastern religions and lifestyles. These philosophies called into question the validity of the 'scientific world view, the supremacy of cerebral cognition, the value of technological prowess' (Roszak 1971: 82). In this way, any analysis or debate must yield not to objective cerebral reality, but to experience.

Influenced by Laing and drawing on existential psychology, Theodore Roszak developed his thesis further, in *Unfinished Animal* (1975). In this account, Roszak saw this transformation in the language and expression of dissent as an evolutionary stage and therefore, an inevitability. Here, human nature in the modern west was envisaged as 'unfulfilled potentiality' of the possibilities of 'life as an adventure in self-development' (Roszak 1977: 7). This potential lay in the 'shaft of subjectivity' embedded so deep in the human consciousness that it could 'lead us clean through all that is perishably personal and culturally contingent to a universal ground beneath' (Roszak 1977: 17). What the transcendent consciousness had

demonstrated was that despite the crumbling of human and environmental systems on which the apex of advanced industrialism rested, there was also an 'ecology of the psychic environment which must be trusted' (Roszak 1977: 43). The task on the 'Aquarian Frontier' was to recapture this visionary core. It would be an evolutionary breakthrough in consciousness, a 'psychic mutation' and 'wilful reconstitution of the genetic juices' amongst the disaffiliate vanguard groups that made up the Aquarian Frontier. This introspective and visionary adventure would transcend the 'dismal and diminished human image we inherit from the past two centuries of industrialisation' (Roszak 1977: 74–79).

The Technics of Liberation

Roszak's mode of explanation – of a dissentient, subterranean youth constructing transcendent forms of thought and language against a technocratic order – was common to many contemporaneous theories of countercultural dissent that affected the London counterculture. Indeed, they formed a large part of the way the counterculture represented itself in the city's underground press. Paul Goodman as a frequent contributor to American underground papers and through syndication in London publications, and occasional visitor to the city such as speaking at the Dialectics of Liberation conference, was another influential figure with similar ideas around technocracy, nature and consciousness. In *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) Goodman, like Marcuse, Roszak and Laing, wrote of the disaffiliation and alienation of the young in an increasingly organised society. In this, he pre-empted Roszak's call for the attachment to childish playfulness in the rejection of the process of acculturation and socialisation that the young generation faced.

Goodman's spiritual–anarchistic thesis sought to reconcile the soul with society. His writing was at once both anarchistic and mystical, using metaphysical language because 'ultimately, anarchism is a metaphysic, comprehended only in the heart's heart' (Ponte 1972a: 2). Society had become rationalised and objectified to the point where it had become abstracted from being and community. For Goodman, such rationalisation imposed a kind of functionalism upon community, the relations of production dissolved community spirit, and he was nostalgic for a proto-industrial past: 'The loveliness of so many hamlets in Europe is that they have shape and are built of local materials by local crafts' (Goodman 1970: 96). The modern urban form had concealed the rhythms of nature, no one 'gives birth or is gravely ill or dies. Seasons are only weather, for in the Supermarket there is no sequence of food and flowers' (Goodman 1970: 121). In short, it was the failings of modernity to live up to a promise of emancipation and liberation that produced an alienated and disaffiliated youth: 'It is the missed revolution of modern times – the falling-short and the compromises – that add up to the conditions that made it hard for the young to grow up in our society' (Goodman 1970: 183).

There are convergences in Goodman's thesis with the work of the British philosopher and 'Angry Young Man' Colin Wilson (see Chapter 2). Like Wilson, Goodman appealed for the intervention of 'great men', visionaries and outsiders,

'[s]imple', 'direct' and 'fearless' souls like Gandhi, Einstein or Picasso were rarely taken seriously but could be the sages to replace the bureaucratic administrators overseeing the abstract society. To justify these claims, Goodman took the Beat Generation as an example. For him, their art was somehow beyond the ordinary means of expression, a peculiar psychosis which recognised the flaws in oneself and the world, making this recognition solid in their medium and so improving a 'bit of real world for others' (Goodman 1970: 146). This aesthetic would begin to win its way in the world as new magazines, small theatres and radical publications began to offset the influence of Hollywood and Madison Avenue. More than the inner-city Black rebellion, the groups which would eventually pioneer these new political outlets, the hippies, were for Goodman, the most harassed, because they directly threatened the self-justification of the objective system, the way that actions were rationalised within an internal logic (Goodman, 1968).

For New Left activists versed in more traditional forms of politicking, it was the global student revolt which constituted the only viable and imaginative rejection of the technocratic order, but a similar analysis developed amongst them too. The 'academic revolution' had resulted from the growth in the productive forces of western society, creating a strata of intellectuals detached from the old conception of the term, that is, as a 'privileged elite of social administrators' (Quattrocchi and Nairn 1968: 157). Expansion in the 'mental production' base of the academy had led to an 'unprecedented dialectical conflict', an 'ever greater part of the modern economy and of social life generally is given over to the production of a consciousness' (Quattrocchi and Nairn 1968: 159) thus heightening the contradictions. Within a Marxian framework, this was a manifestation of the last phase of capital's progress where there is established the material conditions for liberation. This notion of an expansion in the production of consciousness was seen as a necessary but dangerous side-effect of the progress of industrialisation and the subordination of the individual to the state: the socio-linguistic dominance of society, transmitted through the mass media, was internalised to each individual's consciousness but could potentially lose its effectiveness there precisely because of the expansion in the powers of 'mental production' and freedom of expression. Effectively, the tools of liberation were the new modes of communication. The New Left could use these manifestations of late capitalism for their own ends. Now, rather than subjugating, this new technology was politically and culturally liberating: 'The new powers of mental production contained in our electronic technology release us from the mechanical patterns of the past' (Quattrocchi and Nairn 1968: 167). Whilst a different train of logic to that of the hippies led New Left activists to this take on contemporary technologies and their potentially liberating effects, the discourse as we have seen was prevalent in the counterculture.

This qualitative shift in the potentialities of modern technology excited some contemporary commentators. Murray Bookchin, a long time anarchist with experience of the left since the 1930s wrote in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) of the virtually unlimited potential for technological development in providing machines as substitutes for labour: 'Technology has finally passed

from the realm of invention to that of design – in other words, from fortuitous discoveries to systematic innovations' (Bookchin 1990: 117). The advent of the digital computer or 'electronic mind' was particularly important to this transition and held the potential to liberate the worker from 'uncreative mental tasks', beckoning a 'new industrial revolution' (Bookchin 1990: 123). New technology could actually reawaken a sense of dependence with the environment and restate the 'balance between man and nature' (Bookchin 1990: 136), enabling a sense of 'human wholeness'. This reawakening would be achieved outside the urban centres. Agricultural mechanisation would recreate a consciousness of agriculture as husbandry practised within a communitarian society. In this way, cultivation would be regarded with the same 'playful and creative attitude that men so often bring to gardening' (Bookchin 1990: 140). By virtue of its ecological demands, agriculture would also become an intellectual, scientific and artistic challenge: 'Communitarians will blend with the world of life around them as organically as the community blends with its region. They will regain the sense of oneness with nature that existed in humans from primordial times' (Bookchin 1990: 141). A fusion of technology and nature would foster organic modes of thought, and nature would once again constitute an integral part of culture and consciousness. Clearly, these new movements and their spokespersons did not arise from any Luddite rejection of new technology, rather they asserted that this technology had the potential to effect a change in consciousness and so (in principle) embraced it.

The global underground's own discourse adopted the rhetoric of modern technology. Apparently neutrally, it used the nomenclature of the nuclear age to express the structure of the underground. Within the 'macrocosmic endeavour of science', individuals were increasingly encouraged to become 'microcosmic'. The 'logic of science itself led us back to the "conception of the universe"' or cosmos (Schwartz 1973: 42). The rhetoric of modern science frequently appears when dealing with hallucinogens as sacraments too. Science had delivered a new sacrament, LSD, patriarchs and hip scientists like Leary were prepared to fuse scientific approaches to their own philosophies: 'How can you appreciate the divine unless you comprehend the smallest part of the fantastic design?' – the atom (Leary 1990: 51). For some, however, it was the organic component of the original strains of LSD, Ergot, which provided the spiritual component to the experience. Michael Hollingshead (1973) traces a decline in the intensity of his own experiences to the loss of this 'living part' throughout the 1960s as it was gradually synthesised away from its original organic inspirations, mescaline and Peyote. For him, there was a loss of the meta-political implication of 'pure acid', the 'hidden truth or statement in each acid session which is unaccountably missing in most of my experiences using the clandestine stuff' (Hollingshead 1973: 198). Nevertheless, Hollingshead compared experience of LSD with modern technical and electronic advances in the way that it destroyed linear modes of consciousness and logic, literally a shift from the printing press to the satellite, where people's lives, directions and goals changed, and it became 'impossible for them to exist in the formal, structured world so favoured by the Establishment' (Hollingshead 1973: 218).

Such logic chimed with experience: the 1960s counterculture was of the first generation whose shared history included television, computers and transistors. They were 'the products of mass education … and of advanced technology, which has given ... a more expanded consciousness' (Sinclair 1972: 5). As such, many analyses identified a pattern emerging. The pattern suggested that there was 'at least some indication that a post-industrial level of technology [was] creating the rudiments of pre-industrial (in fact pre-literate) thinking and social organisation' (Messer 1972: 152). Effectively, through electronic technology a segmenting system had been replaced by an integrative one. The hippies had abandoned dogmatism and were hostile to doctrine and formula (Keniston 1971: 285–302) and the revolutionary potential of these new movements came from within technological change which had created its own obsolescence, so that technology became the means by which liberation was to be achieved and the basis of a new 'electronic culture' (Young 1973: 191). This is not, as Paul Willis of Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies once hypothesised, a 'dark romantic rejection of modernism pure and simple' (Willis 1978: 179), but a recognition of the possibilities awarded in the new cybernetic age, in which the machine would replicate and be replicated by the evolving, living organism (Wiener 1973: 52–57). Even factions of the New Left were also keen to seize the possibilities of these innovations, adapting Marcuse, and looking forward to the abolition of labour: 'Science must be used to serve to critical impetus instead of the oppressive forces' (Ronning 1968).

Marshall McLuhan: the Medium is the Message

There were then numerous versions of a similar idea about the contemporary role of technology, its affect if humanity and human consciousness, and liberatory potential that were consumed by the counterculture. Many would have first encountered these ideas however through the work of Marshall McLuhan who perhaps more than any of the public intellectuals already discussed, had the greatest influence on the popular factions of the counterculture. McLuhan, 'one of the few non-orientalised intellectuals whom the hippies bother to read' (Davis 1967: 10), was adopted by the counterculture along with other patriarchs, Marcuse, Laing, Roszak, Buckminster Fuller and Goodman. To them, McLuhan's slogans, like 'the medium is the message', 'hit us with telegraphic immediacy and the opacity of their clever, clever wordplay' (Ferguson 1991: 73).

McLuhan was by training a literary theorist who had become interested in the workings of the media and mass communications through the expanded scope that the 'New Criticism' in English literature allowed, combined with the influence of Lewis Mumford's technics, Harold Innis's time–space biases of communication and an interest in Wyndam Lewis and modernist aesthetics (Ferguson 1991: 75, Lindley 1986: 392, Curtis 1983: 80). He was the first academic to analyse the media in all its guises without a singular reliance on media content. His most important and, as his biographer Marchand (1989) believes, most comprehensible

work is *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, first published in 1964. In this book he builds on his less populist scholarly works *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), and lays down the foundations for his later more abstract and inaccessible media analysis. But his theorising extended beyond the media to changes in society generally, which he explained in terms of the decline in the dominance of linear print media and the rise of non-linear electronic and computer communications. To this extent, he has been variously labelled a modernist (Morgan 1990: 23–24), and a pioneer post-modernist (Berman 1983: 31–32, Slatin 1990). His theories on popular culture and consumption can be read as the diametrical opposite to those of Marcuse, since McLuhan saw the liberating potential of new forms of communication, 'a wonderful opportunity for the "incarnation" of human experience' (Kroker 1984: 441). And yet, these two competing accounts of similar phenomena, the consciousness industry and electronic media, coexisted within the counterculture and their 'epistemological disjunction appeared not to trouble the first television generation' (Ferguson 1991: 76). For the journalist Tom Wolfe, McLuhan changed the direction of social science itself, for 'no other reason than that he has opened up the whole subject of the way the new technologies are changing people's thinking, reactions, lifestyles, everything' (Wolfe 1969: 43). Indeed, like Marcuse, McLuhan would also affect the future direction of critical theory, particularly through Jean Baudrillard (Kellner 1989: 67–75).

McLuhan saw all forms of media in the Mechanical age (pre electronic) as extensions of our bodies in space. In the present technological age with the advent of electronic mediums however, we 'have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned' (McLuhan 1964: 3). As new media arrived personal and social consequences resulted from the new scale introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves. The 'message' of any medium or technology therefore 'is the change in scale or pace or pattern that is introduced into human affairs' (McLuhan 1964: 8). The 'content' of any medium on the other hand is always another medium. So, the content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print. McLuhan disregarded the effects of media content on social relations as more or less ineffectual, noting that for instance, the railway transformed landscape in a similar way across all regions regardless of freight (content). In short, the *medium* is the message. The message of television was not what was broadcast but the effect television had on culture, how it changed people and social relations (Feigen 1989: 65). McLuhan (with Powers) would later develop a methodology for testing the side-effects of new technologies, 'the tetrad', which explored the transformations in culture based on the effects of not only media, but all innovations (Jones 1992: 93). In this sense, McLuhan was, as many critics labelled him, a technological determinist. The effects of new machines on culture appear intangible, even mystical, and beyond the control of the individual. For McLuhan then, as he developed his theories, the direction of these innovations was not necessarily liberating. There was an inherent 'violence' in the new electronic

media, individuals are 'instantly invaded and deprived of their physical bodies and are merged in a network of extensions of their own nervous systems' (McLuhan 1989: 92). But it was his disregard for the content and particularly the political control of mass communications which drew most criticism and prompted him to revise his approach. Later, McLuhan would emphasise the 'violent' effects of mass communications, and how 'technocommunications systems tend to take off on their own, overriding and overloading the audience' (Widmer 1973: 37).

By classifying media in a spectrum of hot to cool, McLuhan attempted to demonstrate how the new electronic media could potentially enable the evolution of a Global Village through the elimination and implosion of space and time. A 'hot' medium in his conception was one that extends one single sense in 'high definition'. It presented information sequentially or linearly and had a high data content. A 'cool' medium was one which was in 'low definition'. Cool mediums provided a meagre amount of data in a non-linear fashion. Cool mediums demanded a higher level of involvement and participation and were therefore inclusive because the perceiver must involve his/her faculties in order to piece information together to comprehend it, whereas a hot medium excludes because it was total information leaving little room for negotiation or interpretation (Adelman 1972: 140–163). The 'Mechanical Age' broke the social networks of traditional oral societies (those with a high level of interaction and participation) by the introduction of hot mediums like mass produced printing, whilst the 'Technological Age' was characterised by the introduction of much cooler mediums (TV, movies, telephone etc.). Cooler mediums because they demanded involvement and participation McLuhan thought, had the potential to retribalise society:

> A tribal and feudal hierarchy of traditional kind collapses quickly when it meets any hot medium of the mechanical, uniform and repetitive kind ... Similarly, a very much greater speed up, such as occurs with electricity, may serve to restore a tribal pattern of intense involvement such as took place with the introduction of radio in Europe, and is now tending to happen as a result of T.V. in America. Specialist technologies detribalize. The non specialist technology retribalizes. (Marshall McLuhan 1964: 24)

It was this that the counterculture found most appealing: 'Put more simply, the Orientalisation of the West, the insight brought by media, is that people want roles, not goals, style not objectives' (Ponte 1972b: 35). But, as a devout Catholic and conservative, McLuhan's notion of the emergent tribal society differed markedly from the counterculture's interpretation (Morgan 1990: 21–22, Kroker 1984: 438–446, Marchand 1989). McLuhan's notion was imbued with an 'austere morality', and he had a strong belief in the ultimate evolution of moral control in the Global Village. Whilst in the transition to the retribalised society there was an inevitable explosion of sexual energy, eventually, moral values would be realised (ironically, McLuhan wrote of this resurgence of moral fibre in *Playboy*). In such a integrated tribal society, marriage and family would become 'inviolate institutions' and

infidelity and divorce would constitute 'serious violations of the social bond' (Theall 1971: 61).

   The concept of the Global Village was at the heart of McLuhan's analysis. His optimistic vision of the future was most important in this context by its geography (see for example Gold 1991): Electronic media caused an implosion effect, everything was localised, de spaced and retribalised, creating a neo-primordial world in which participation and interaction were maximised. This vision has obvious similarities to many of the counterculture's projects. It was a simulation, and hence, reassertion of nature and the cosmos into culture. In this sense, the new technologies were themselves 'nature' (McLuhan 1970: 14). All media were extensions of ourselves, and the new electronic media were specifically extensions of our central nervous system, the climax of these developments being the 'technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society' (McLuhan 1964: 34). In other words, the development of a single transcendent consciousness. The Advertising industry had a role to play here. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, McLuhan earned consultancy fees from Madison Avenue, and for him, they were at the vanguard of the retribalisation of society; 'Bless Madison Ave for restoring the magical art of the caveman to suburbia' (McLuhan 1970: 131).

McLuhan and the Underground

Although the printed word was seen as part of the mechanical hot media, changing balances in the 'ratio of mediums' allowed it in McLuhan's Technological Age, to cool down in particular forms. The 'ratio of mediums' referred directly to the period in question. In the Mechanical Age, for instance, the medium of print superseded the medium of speech but had an affect on speech itself. Similarly, in the Technological Age, the new electronic mediums affected the content and style of print, hence McLuhan's insistence on the effect of new mediums on the wider environment. Since mediums were extensions of the senses, this ultimately affected our actions, and with electronic mediums, our consciousness. The effect of all new technologies then, was to impose their 'deep assumptions upon the human psyche by reworking the ratio of the senses' (Kroker 1984: 434). This was especially applicable to the news magazine as opposed to the picture magazine: 'Whereas the spectator of the picture magazine is passive [photographs are a hot medium packed with data], the reader of the news magazine becomes much involved with the making of meanings for the corporate image' (McLuhan 1964: 204). McLuhan concluded that the habit of involvement in the TV mosaic image strengthened the appeal of these magazines by changing the sense ratios (exercising certain senses more than others and heightening their sensitivity) through a change in the balance of the 'ratio of mediums' (i.e. environmental change). The new underground newspapers were part of, if not at the forefront of exploiting this new mosaic genre.

From its inception, the underground press paid heed to concepts and ideas similar to those of McLuhan. The small magazines of the late 1950s in Britain from which *International Times*, *Oz*, *Friends*, et al. sprang, followed the example of the Beats who had attempted to develop this single consciousness through the establishment of 'their own version of McLuhan's global village in New York, on the West Coast, in Paris, Tangiers and London' (Hewison 1986: 96). Although it is difficult to infer the direct influence of McLuhan on the underground press, it is possible at the very least, to see the small magazines which influenced the development of the underground press, as part of the trends observed by McLuhan. McLuhan's books and periodicals were advertised in most underground publications, and his magazine *Aspen* explicitly catered for countercultural consumption. An advert for the first issue of *Aspen* in some underground papers for example, boasts that 'our medium will massage you about the tribal man, [with] a psychedelic poster of the Tribal Stomp at the Avalon Ballroom' (*Ramparts* 1967). McLuhan's ideas informed the editorial policy of some underground papers not least because of scattered references to him throughout. Indeed, as the 'IT BUST MANIFESTO' stressed, the 'new movement is numerically weaker than CND at its strongest, but its members seem to have an instinctive understanding of McLuhan style media theory: they know how to use the media to strongest advantage' (BAMN 1971: 80).

Coverage of McLuhan's theories in the underground press was extensive and not just because many of them were so easily captured in pithy slogans and one-liners. McLuhan's ideas not only affected the underground press in terms of editorial policy and style, but also less textual forms of countercultural cultural politics such as the philosophy of sound and light experiments and acid rock. He had then a wide-ranging influence on the direction of the underground as a whole. There was amongst the counterculture a recognition, somewhat contrary to the view of Roszak and Marcuse, that not necessarily all science was technocratic, that, like the alchemist or the Buddhist, science could 'show you precisely where the brain stops and the mind begins' (Youngblood 1970a: 42). Technology, like humanity, was part of the evolutionary process, producing a new, global consciousness and promising a 'whole earth revolution' (Youngblood 1970b: 24). Such a revolution would lay bear technocracy's divisive bureaucracy using electronic media and 'pure' information for revolutionary ends. This 'Videosphere' was constituted by global television, making the invisible visible, that is, 'all the thoughts of humanity simultaneously [made visible] all around the planet' (Youngblood 1970a: 42).

For similar reasons, William Burroughs referred to this phenomenon as the 'Age of total confront' because hitherto invisible aspects of the condition of technocracy became apparent: 'Implicit technologies, bureaucratic structures and power stratagems, conventionalized family group set-ups, and our own invisible brethren ... are suddenly parading before us in the raw' (Tinker 1969: 36). To this end, many underground press journalists, particularly the American syndicated columnist Gene Youngblood, interpreted developments on the scene within this framework. Underground cinema for example, in its abandonment of linear

narrative form, was like the 'science of bionics in relation to previous concepts of biology and technology' (Youngblood 1968a: 18, see Chapter 8). That is, it modelled itself on the patterns of nature rather than attempting to explain or conform to nature: 'Both McLuhan and Krishnamurti point out that we don't really live in (that is, take our consciousness from) nature. Instead, we function in an invisible environment of symbolism created by the phonetic alphabet: words and symbols' (Youngblood 1968a: 18). In this way, we are moved from being victims of the environment in the agricultural age, through participants in the environment in the industrial age, toward a point in the 'electro-cybernetic age where each man not only will participate but will actually create his own environment' (Youngblood 1969a: 27). Whole earth revolution was grafted onto Einsteinian physics. Science had proved that physical energy was constant throughout the universe but that this physical wealth necessarily increased with use, 'because of metaphysical wealth (i.e. intellect) by which man irreversibly attains greater control over his destiny and environment' through electronic technology (Youngblood 1969b: 34). Technology was seen to be the physical manifestation of metaphysical wealth and by modifying the environment it seemed to reveal an ultimate truth that necessitated a change in consciousness, becoming globally aware that this new physical environment was not the property of any one individual, but of the global village.

This was a popular philosophy in the counterculture and one which was also used to explain the underground press. These new technologies allowed the previously invisible to be made visible; information was all that was required to destabilise the system. Unrestricted reportage was the most radical gesture. This however was not a gift from technocracy, but required a great deal of capital: 'while people should realize that altering the means of communication means altering society and that to seek such alteration is a legitimately revolutionary aim, it is naive to believe that companies and their competitors are going to make a gift of that possibility' (*Ink* 1971a: 21). The ultimate truth that science revealed need not deny a mystical element, on the contrary, it was a facet engendered in the concept of the global village which demonstrated that the environment was made up of inter-related energy flows: 'The mystics and visionaries all saw this clearly but the rest of us need video (and acid) to make it evident' (Benhari 1971: 10). Electronic media (after McLuhan) could stimulate a global telepathy. The collapsing of time and space would eventually enable, through the technology of television, communication from 'brain to brain', to be in contact at one instant with everyone and anyone, 'to be able to experience the experience they're having. It's mind swap!' (Hopkins 1970).

Text Verses Image

We will see in Chapter 8 that one of the most significant applications of McLuhan's ideas was in the performative cultural politics of the multi-media lightshow. For the remainder of this chapter however, I want to focus on the wider anti-textual imagination evident in the activities of the counterculture and which are also present in McLuhan's thinking. Whilst the primary means of mass communication

for the counterculture was through the small magazines, newspapers and fliers of the underground press, there was, as the fascination with the work of Marshall McLuhan implies, an in-built distrust of the text and textuality at the very roots of the counterculture. This distrust rejected a tradition in modern western thought which simultaneously asserted the importance of sight as the root of all knowledge whilst also suspecting it (Tuan 1979). 'Since Plato first condemned the scene painters who deal in phantoms, western thinkers have sought to probe beneath the world's illusory surface to reach a deeper, more authentic understanding expressed in language – in the written word or mathematical symbol'. Visual expression is read as ephemeral, elusive, duplicitous, and as a tool of capitalist societies, whilst the 'very power of textuality can be seen as repressive and mystifying', obscuring the image (Cosgrove and Daniels 1993: 59).

In London in the late 1950s and early 1960s as was briefly described in the introduction, the artist John Latham carried out a series of attacks on the word which included the symbolic destruction of books (some priceless), frequently in the form of a tower filled with fireworks, a Skoob tower (Hewison 1986: 115–116). Around the same time Jeff Nuttall, author of *Bomb Culture* (1968), published *My Own Mag*, a surrealist poetry magazine for the consumption of a small community of London artists. No two issues of *My Own Mag* were the same. Each issue was printed on different coloured paper employing William Burroughs's cut-up technique in the typed text, and offering the opportunity for the readership to perform their own cut-up with random cuttings provided from various publications and stuck to the front.

At the heart of these actions stood a countercultural conviction that the distinction between life and art which occurred as a result of artistic categorisation was repressive. In Robert Hewison's words; 'Since the word seemed incapable of coming to terms with the horrors of the twentieth century – and in the hands of propagandists and the self interested it served to perpetrate them – there was an argument to be made for the retreat into silence' (Hewison 1986: 84). Language structures and describes the material world, so this truth could not be expressed in conventional language. This led to the exploration of inner space to escape the imposed definitions of material reality by ignoring all boundaries and categorisations. It was hoped that life became art and vice versa, and that each aesthetic statement was at the same time a statement of political intent. By destroying or perverting language then, the illusion of reality could be broken and laid bare.

William Burroughs, an exponent of the necessity to assault and destabilise language, often appeared in the British underground press and was frequently resident in London during the emergence of the countercultural scene in the late 1960s (Miles 1997: 238–243) . Burroughs's work came from the fringes of the Beat Generation and his search for the timeless spiritual life had ultimately 'reached such a pitch [that], not only society but Nature appeared as a confidence trick, a chronic imposition' (Nuttall 1968: 106) and the world of dreams became more real. This surrealist belief in the greater reality of the dream led Burroughs to develop the cut–up method which involved the cutting up and folding in of a variety of self prepared original prose with cuttings from newspapers, magazines, novels
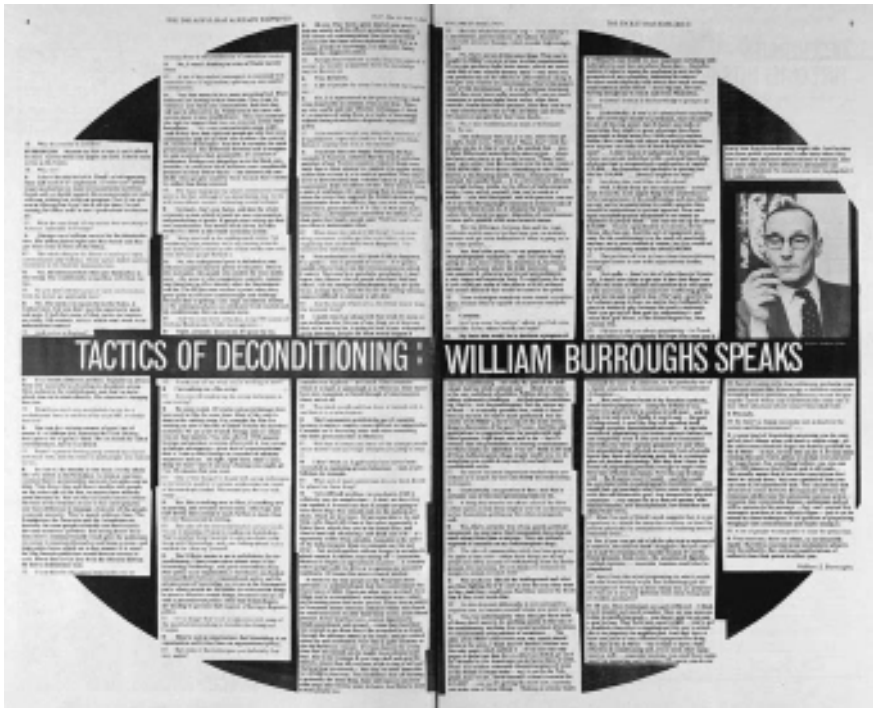
Figure 6.5   William Burroughs made regular contributions to London's underground press many of which worked through his deconditioning tactics including this one from *International Times* issue 57 (23 May 1969)

Source: © IT with thanks to www.international-times.org.uk.

and other found textual objects. Cut-up was seen as an 'incorruptible voice, not belonging to any self interested individual, not attached to any needing, habitable body, an accessible truth beyond the trivial statistics of time and matter' (Nuttall 1968: 164). By choosing phrases and words from three columns of scrambled print (the standard format) a part of the mind without a common voice was thought to take over the selections for you, causing a kind of *deja vu*. Burroughs and his followers saw this part of the mind as the 'Common mind you share with previous ages, the Jungian racial subconscious ... the mind we share with one another' (Nuttall 1968: 164). The sabotage of language was seen as a key to the exploration of inner space and development of a common consciousness, or ultimate truth.

There are clearly then elements of Burroughs' work that share McLuhan's outlook even though their origins, style and philosophical outlook differ fundamentally. Like Burroughs, McLuhan saw language had a structuring effect on consciousness and individual freedom, the act of naming something or someone

implied a controlling power: 'the name of a man is the most numbing blow from which he never recovers' (McLuhan 1964: 32). In this logic, identity was the equation of the word with an object or process, and it was this potency of the word against which Burroughs struggled because it imposed a myth of reality. For Burroughs then, nothing was real, nothing 'had ever any "reality" except the reality assigned to it by the observer' (Burroughs 1970a: 20). In order to destabilise this myth one had to decondition the individual and make them aware of how language represses.

Burroughs attempted to do this with electronic technology, through a series of experiments with tape recorders, an 'externalised section of the human nervous system'. He explained this technique in a series of articles written for and published in the London *International Times* in 1967. The tape recorder allowed you to 'find out more about the nervous system and gain more control over your reaction [to any given situation] by using the tape recorder than you could find out sitting 20 years in the lotus posture' (Burroughs 1967: 6). By making a series of recordings, the operator could decondition him/herself, playing back at various speeds and in various situations pre-recorded events, losing the dominance of accepted meanings and associations, and subverting the right time and place for particular actions. Breaking the linear, logical form of a narrative, as in the cut-up method, the underlying truths became more vivid, and the operators conditioning more apparent as dominant language lost its rationale. Effectively, it was possible to program yourself with the tape recorder as an extension of the central nervous system.

The Function of the Underground Press

It was undoubtedly through Burroughs's frequent engagement with the London counterculture that he developed a particular respect for the role of the underground press. He saw the underground press as an effective tool in the project of deconditioning the individual, as a counter to the mass media's mind manipulation and total power over government policies; 'The UP has now reached a point [1969] where they pose quite an effective challenge … [and] … in so far as the underground press are dedicated to de-control, that is a counter-move' (Burroughs 1969: 4). Ultimately, the consciousness that these deconditioning tactics enabled was brain wave control. Individuals would be in total control of their own environments through total control of their brain wave emissions. A global organism acting together telepathically would determine the environment. The Woodstock festival had, for Burroughs, created a 'Woodstock consciousness' and demonstrated that this 'new consciousness with the mass emanation of brain waves can produce far reaching effects' (Burroughs 1970b: 41).

Very soon after the first edition of the *International Times* was published in London numerous other underground publications arrived in the city, and, partly because they tapped into a pre-existing global (or at least transatlantic) network of likeminded publications, the underground press in London became a powerful and significant force. As it grew, its editors, journalists and patriarchs of the counterculture

made various claims for its function. The proponents of an underground press were concerned to lay bare the facts about technocratic society utilising modern media techniques. This new media seemed to redefine the format of the printed word and the function of the media generally. Whether this was a vital industry for countering the technocratic order through a type of post-scarcity anarchism, as a signifier of some kind of back to the land movement in Reich's, Bookchin's or Goodman's terms, or an emblem of a new tribal awareness, a reawakening of oral culture through non-linear media techniques in Abbie Hoffman's and Marshall McLuhan's terms, the underground press was seen as central to the whole countercultural movement.

Burroughs himself took a broad view of the function of the underground press seeing it as an effective counter to the mind manipulation of the straight media: 'In Western societies, where a democratic facade is still maintained like an old film backdrop, the real power rests in the hands of those who manipulate the mass mind through the mass media' (Burroughs 1971: 44). For John Sinclair, founder of the White Panther Party and the Rainbow People's Party, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the underground press and their staff were the true lifeforce and catalyst of the counterculture: 'The Underground papers are the source and effect of our spirit flesh. The staff are the source and effect of the papers, just as you are' (Sinclair 1971: 180). It was envisioned that once every major city and campus had a newspaper, the young would be enveloped in a total 'underground environmental culture' (DeMaio 1970: 1).

A free press was viewed as an element in the vanguard of the movement by speaking the 'truth', simply reporting and carrying information was the most radical action. Drawing on the rhetoric of Underground dissent, Varela, a *Los Angeles Free Press* reporter, defined this vanguard role: 'The discipline of the free subversive is a private commitment to a way of living out your resources: spiritual, sensual, intellectual and physical resources. Free subversives don't preach revolution, they report it' (Varela 1971: 7). In an environment where revolutionaries were not common, this reporting was the most subversive act. Reporting 'spreads hope', 'strengthens commitment' and 'gets the fence sitters off their asses' (Varela 1971: 7). Underground papers were in this sense, tangible alternatives to the consumer society and at the forefront of an alternative economy which spread throughout the sphere of cultural production, from underground films to countercultural paraphernalia. It was this endeavour to question established norms, in a way that the straight media appeared not to, utilising a revolutionary language and format, which perhaps best defines the underground press. And it is to the most influential, radical and revolutionary of London's underground publications, *Oz* that I now want to turn.

Chapter 7

Oz, London
and Cosmic Consciousness

> Since Sputnik and the satellites, the planet is enclosed in a manmade environment
> that ends 'Nature' and turns the globe into a repertory theater to be programmed.
> Shakespeare at the Globe mentioning 'All the world's a stage, and all the men
> and women merely players' … has been justified by recent events in ways that
> would have struck him as entirely paradoxical. The results of living inside a
> proscenium arch of satellites is that the young now accept the public spaces of
> the earth as role-playing areas. Sensing this, they adopt costumes and roles and
> are ready to 'do their thing' everywhere. (McLuhan and Watson 1970: 9–10)

In this chapter I want to explore the counterculture of London as it found
expression in *Oz*, one of the best selling underground publications of the 1960s that
ran between 1967 and 1973 and was certainly a more notorious publication than
International Times. If there was a publication that best represents the 'popular'
hippy underground then it would be *Oz*. *Oz* like other underground papers was not
necessarily consumed by full time revolutionaries and indeed probably found a
readership well beyond those whom one might consider countercultural. Mapping
the geographies of *Oz* then helps demonstrate the way in which the strongest
and most influential faction of underground London perceived the role of the
counterculture both nationally and globally. Sources for this chapter are almost
exclusively drawn from the magazine itself.

In its text and format, *Oz* was the most lucid British example of the application of
contemporary ideas about media theory and anti-technocratic thought and practice
explored in the Chapter 6. The magazine was self-consciously sociological in its
analysis of various situations, its editors and contributors being well schooled in
structuralist and putative post-structuralist accounts of contemporary society. It
recognised too from the same sources the potential of science and technology
to liberate consciousness. In this sense, *Oz* (after McLuhan) amalgamated
technology and new media techniques to promote a new mysticism was intent
upon transcending established categories of political ideology and activism within
the counterculture. These were the primary aims of the magazine's founder and
editor, Richard Neville. Although the content of *Oz* presents a series of conflicting
and contradictory attitudes representing the full range of countercultural
ideologies, the way they were reproduced in the magazine itself tended to play
down their ideological content. For this reason *Oz* perhaps best represents all that
the New Left found distasteful in the underground – a kandy-kolored, grab-bag
of hollow revolutionary rhetoric, wishy-washy liberalism and more importantly,

the veneration of the image and imagination above ideology and action. Although *Oz* presented the position of the New Left and other radical groups in full, on two occasions devoting whole issues to this perspective, the editors abused the text with graphics and illustrations, rendering these messages, for the left, a series of vapid slogans and vague images.

With this playful ideology, *Oz* projected an imagined geography of underground London. This underground geography was consistently elusive, a series of shifting undercurrents beyond the reach of the establishment, perpetually metamorphosing, consciously avoiding co-option. Throughout, the New Left persistently criticised the shallow nature of this approach and within the pages of the magazine itself. Not only did a scatological format incorporate a series of ill thought out images, it appropriated some of the worst elements from dominant society, not the least of which was sexism. Richard Neville now sees the changing perspective of the magazine as a marker for shifts in prevailing attitudes. For him, *Oz* died of natural causes. It was very much part of the 1960s spirit and it was apt that each should disappear at the same time. But it did partially recant: the final few issues of *Oz* 'pulsated with doubts and fears of a sexual revolution turned sour, well before the shadow of Aids' (Neville 1993: 3). For David Widgery, one of *Oz*'s few regular contributors from the left, the major factor in the demise of both the movement and its publications was its inability to recognise the importance of feminism as a significant concept in the formation of radical social alternatives. As much as the counterculture dropped out of straight society, it still carried with it the cultural baggage of patriarchy. This was reflected in the all male management, the content, and presentation of the underground press. As David Widgery wrote in the final issue of *Oz*, evoking one of the *Oz* trial's most overworked phrases which captured the establishment's view of the alternative lifestyle:

> Men defined themselves as rebels against society in ways limited to their own sex, excluding women except as loyal companions or Mother figures ... Because the underground remained so utterly dominated by men, sexual liberation was framed in terms saturated with male assumptions, right down to the rape fantasy of 'Dope, rock and roll and fucking in the streets'. (Widgery 1973: 66)

Despite, or perhaps because of these accusations, *Oz* did implicitly represent a coherent cultural politics. *Oz*'s philosophy proved most attractive to the majority, the counterculture's part-timers – or weekend hippies – rather than the minority of committed full-time revolutionaries. The purpose of this chapter is to map the geographies of this popular perspective using the text of *Oz*.

Oz Magazine

Articles from *Oz* appeared more often than any other British publication in the American underground press. Perhaps with the exception of some San Francisco

papers like *The San Francisco Oracle* or *Open City*, *Oz* was the most adventurous magazine both graphically and journalistically. It was estimated by the *Oz* editorial team that at its height of popularity, *Oz* reached up to one million British readers. Far fewer than this number was ever sold since the cost, 4s/6d rising to 40p, meant that each issue, between 30,000 and 100,000 per month, had a pass-on readership ('*Oz*: 20 Years On', BBC2 15 November 1992, Sarler 1991: 18). An ineffective distribution service concentrated the circulation around London and the Home Counties although some reached more sizable provincial towns and the United States. The magazine ran from February 1967 through to the summer of 1973 with a total of 48 issues. The original intention was to publish every month, but economic constraints, legal problems and difficulty with printers, particularly later in the magazine's run, meant that a number of months were missed. Editors and editorial staff changed from time to time although key members, like Richard Neville, Felix Dennis, Jim Anderson, Martin Sharp, David Widgery and Germaine Greer, each remained for a considerable portion of the publication's run.

The consumers of *Oz* are less easy to identify and classify, making an accurate social geography of the readership troublesome. One can speculate however, like Tony Palmer in his account of the *Oz* trial (1971), that adolescents represented a sizable portion of overall sales. Indeed, the obscenity trial revealed that *Oz* was well known and well read amongst school children, especially schoolboys. The magazine did attract an older readership later in its run however, when greater scope was given for more abstract and incisive articles and analysis.

As a cultural form, *Oz* blended 'art and politics in a new way' (Hoffman 1971: 18) and from its inception was much more of a visually orientated publication than other underground papers. Lay-outs, devised by Jon Goodchild, always appear to have taken precedence over textual content and were in part responsible for the burgeoning market for posters and interest in poster design in the late 1960s (Palmer 1971: 19): As *Oz* co-director, occasional editor and now multi-millionaire publisher Felix Dennis noted in *Oz* 47; 'We are and always have been, a visually orientated publication. The number of artists, illustrators and photographers on our files, for example, outweighs our writers by more than three to one' (Dennis 1973: 3). Erratic publishing schedules and unpredictable financial circumstances meant this imbalance was upheld and also caused an excessive number of reprinted articles to be incorporated from syndicated British and American underground papers. As I have noted, *Oz* above many other underground publications sought to integrate contemporary ideas of the media and the written word into their editorial and journalistic agendas by developing non-lineal media techniques within the constraints of the lineal written form and in doing so, heralding, at least in terms of McLuhan's theories, a retribalisation.

Underlying this assertion is not necessarily the assumption that by definition the readership of underground publications passively absorbed the ideology of any paper, nor that reading articles on or by say Leary, Marcuse, or Laing would automatically affect their consciousness in the desired fashion. But there is some evidence to suggest that there was a 'quite seriously-taken process of discourse

within the counterculture' in the letters pages of the underground press (Nelson 1989: 47). Letters appear on the validity of certain ideologies and the applicability of the publication's editorial policies. It follows that not only the ideology, but the social history of the counterculture can be extrapolated from the underground press. In this sense, these publications documented and shaped the trajectory of the underground: like 'the conventional media, the alternative papers provide materials for creating and maintaining a culture' (Leech 1973: 125). *Oz*'s willingness to practice some doctrines on media and the written word, in the organisation of the text and images along with various statements made by its editors and contributors throughout its run, suggests that they shared these philosophical assumptions, or at least were subject to their popularity.

Oz and the Underground Press

Once they found a willing publisher (which after the Chatterley trial in 1960 was quite problematic) underground publications on London were able to take advantage of the new cheapness in offset photolithography, a capacity in which the city developed in the early 1960s. Early publications like *International Times* took stylistic and textual influences from a number of small scale radical publications in Britain produced in the early 1960s. In the late 1950s a crop of provincial magazines and broadsheets were produced cheaply in small numbers on duplicating machines often for circulation amongst groups of friends. These 'catered to the coffee-bar bohemians such as nurtured the Liverpool poets and pop groups' (Hewison 1986: 95). And, as with all countercultural developments, the American influence was pervasive in the evolution of the British underground press, even at these embryonic stages: 'The new magazines looked not to London, but to San Francisco, where Lawrence Ferlinghettis' City Lights Press formed a focus for the American Beat movement' (Hewison 1986: 96).

London *Oz* was formed in February 1967 by Richard Neville, an Australian who was editing a magazine of the same name in Sydney which was soon to fold following the prosecution of an obscenity charge. By 1964, Australian *Oz* had amassed a circulation of 40,000. Following the trial, arising from the front cover of issue six picturing the editors urinating against the wall of Sydney's new P&O building, the magazine lasted for just a few more issues and eventually closed through lack of funds and the absence of Richard Neville. Neville was able to attract some of the people working on Australian *Oz* to London including Martin Sharp, the psychedelic artist, and Marsha Rowe, who would later found the feminist periodical *Spare Rib*. Throughout its run, London *Oz* was compiled from 52 and 70 Princedale Road in Notting Hill.

Neville arrived in London in September 1966 and, noting the dearth of publications providing a 'formalised expression' of the colourful Swinging London scene which presented itself to him, he met with Barry Miles, the owner of the Indica bookshop and involved with *International Times* to discuss the publication
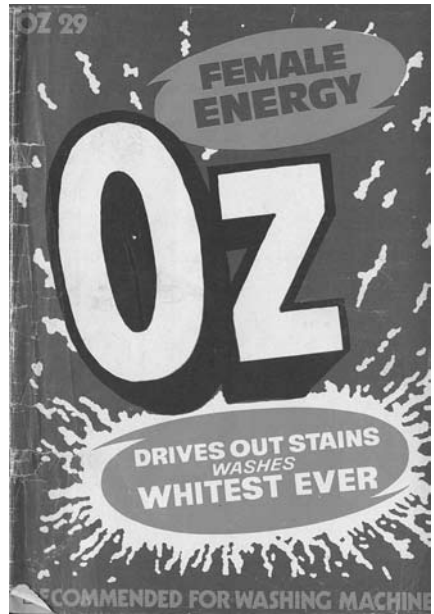
Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3   **A sample of *Oz* covers: Top left *Oz* 1; top right, Germaine Greer's feminist issue, *Oz* 29; bottom, the front and back cover of *Oz* 3.**

Source: Underground Press.

of a magazine that would fill these gaps (Richard Neville in Green 1988: 144). London *Oz* was prompted initially by an *Evening Standard* issue covering the Sydney magazine, and a desire by Neville to say something dramatic to the reporter. Initially, *Oz* aped its Australian counterpart and competed with *Private Eye* as a satire magazine on the London market. Whilst retaining the satirical edge throughout its run, especially on matters surrounding the excesses of hippy philosophy, *Oz* mutated into a psychedelic magazine between issues three and six. The artwork for the magazine's psychedelic design was produced by Martin Sharp, another ex-patriot Australian who pioneered a number of graphic techniques in the genre. This shift to psychedelia was not only caused by the ingestion of LSD by *Oz* staff, or the experience of lightshows in London's new underground clubs, but also by Neville's reading of the American underground press, particularly New York's *East Village Other* edited by John Wilcock. Wilcock, on a visit to London, advised Neville on the format of *Oz* 6 urging him to be eclectic and to incorporate contradictory articles on a wide range of issues, from Michael X to the Diggers. *Oz* 6, issued for August 1967, became a joint issue with Wilcock's nomadic underground publication *Other Scenes*. For Neville, writing later in *Play Power* (1970) this issue symbolised the moment when *Oz* finally stopped swinging and went underground.

Of all the British underground publications *Oz* became technically the most elaborate and ambitious, both artistically and graphically. *Oz* was 'more theoretical and articulate than *IT*', and maintained throughout its run, a 'delight in visual experimentation – even if this did at times render the print illegible' (Nelson 1989: 50). Published in London and for London, *Oz* was initially distributed by ECAL (Effective Communications Arts LTD), the distribution company that evolved from a poster company and was part owned by the *International Times*. When ECAL ran up a debt with *Oz*, Neville sent his future business director and former top street seller, Felix Dennis, to put the company's finances in order. Dennis turned the company around in a few months, and, after paying the debt back, ECAL fired Dennis for running the company like a conventional business (Felix Dennis in Green 1988: 157). *Oz* also had a nationwide distribution network through Moore-Harness and nominal worldwide distribution through the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS).

Oz provided similar information to that of other underground papers including details of festivals, benefits, happenings, be-ins, conferences and concerts. Reviews of these kind of events appeared in most of the monthly issues. Less frequent were reviews of similar occurrences out of London: the exceptions were those arriving from the West Coast through syndication. Personal ad columns were the most popular section of the magazine, helping to place *Oz* and the other papers at the centre of underground London's social network, but causing some problems with the law. Most of the regular business adverts were for sexual appliances and sexual services. In Britain and America, these adverts, more than the journalistic or editorial content of the publications attracted police attention. In the case of *Oz*, Gay *Oz* (No. 23, August 1969) was seized by the Obscene Publications Squad because of the content of the personal ads columns, although no charges were brought. *Oz* also carried product advertisements, a section which would expand

under Dennis's direction, but the bulk of their income came from the sales of the magazine and as such, like many publications, they were a non-profit making organisation.

The Medium of *Oz*

For Richard Neville, the counterculture's understanding of media/message manipulation was instinctive, an inheritance from the graphic experimentation pioneered by early twentieth-century Dadaist periodicals, but exceeding these ideas with the exploitation of mass produced media techniques like offset lithography. A variety of methods were used to 'cool down' the printed word (after McLuhan) and thereby increase the participation of the reader (see Chapter 6). Text was frequently superimposed over pictures which required increased concentration and tended to have the effect of forcing the reader's eye to focus occasionally on the picture and then to switch back to the text. The introduction of the unjustified right-hand margin to the columns although initially for cheapness and practicality, was found to enable editors to mould the text around illustrations and conveniently represented a 'pleasant alternative to rigid newspaper style' (Neville 1970: 188). At its extreme then columns of text varied markedly in width from line to line. The unjustified right-hand margin forced an increased participation of the reader because it was necessary for their eyes to track back the subsequent line from right to left in order to find its beginning. Images were frequently placed to the right of the unjustified column momentarily distracting the reader away from the text. The situation was on occasions further confused by the introduction of an unjustified left-hand margin. Occasionally, columns were abandoned altogether, and the typography blended with the context. Other ploys included varying the typography, changing the colour of the text in relation to the general colour and shade of the background, splitting the text of a feature between different sections of the magazine and removing punctuation and/or capital letters, forcing selection of certain words and phrases. This method of cooling-down the text was also influenced by certain Beat Generation writing which employed similar techniques. William Burroughs used it as a deconditioning tactic and in the effort to destabilise language. Also, Stuart Perkoff, the Venice Beat poet often left the vowels out of some words (see Rycroft 2007).

All of these formats had the tendency of making for selective reading and as such, involved the reader in a dialogue in which they participated by filling in the gaps of what they inadvertently missed, misread or misinterpreted. In effect, *Oz* and other underground publications took the mosaic format a stage further than the news magazines McLuhan evidenced (*Newsweek*, *Time*, etc.) and attempted to mimic TV type participation in printed media. This was sometimes more by accident than design. *Oz*, through the UPS and the wealth of freelance graphic artists in London, incorporated a number of different styles and formats into each issue. For Jim Anderson, one of the magazine's art directors, this chaos and incoherence

**Figure 7.4   A sample of *Oz*'s adventurous graphic strategies from *Oz* 28
               (May 1970: 34)**
Source: Underground Press.

was a symptom of their amateur and sometimes unconscious non-hierarchical
approach. The IBM typesetter enabled the democratisation of the production
and design process, taking liberties with their given texts, changing justification,
adding colours and altering the text with their own interjections (Jim Anderson in
Green 1988: 339). Such democratisation also worked through to the printers and
plate setters, as they mixed inks at will and got involved in the overall appearance
of the final product. The logistics of publishing an underground magazine too had
their influence on this haphazard style with uncertainty of securing permanent
printing facilities from month to month and changes in style dictated by available
equipment.

Visually, *Oz* presented itself as a multi-media experience, an 'art room as theatre
of experiment' (Green 1988: 336). Undoubtedly the happenings, lightshows, drug
experiences occurring in the city at the same time, as well as the poetry-jazz
evenings of the early 1960s influenced this format. Indeed, the visual format of
Oz fed off these largely London-based events whereas the textual content and

its experimental nature was perhaps drawn from the myriad of small provincial magazines, particularly those in North West England. In both cases, the American influence was integral. The happenings in London were based on similar events held on the West Coast whilst the position of a city like Liverpool as a transatlantic port meant that its small publications looked to the Beats for their stylistic and textual format.

Oz was clearly an unconventional publication. Unlike both the straight media and most other underground publications like *IT*, issues rarely carried editorials, deliberately eluding ideological definition and in content and appearance, embodying the 'fun revolution'. The first issue dedicated over six pages to visual effects, indicating from the start, the 'importance *Oz* staff placed upon this aspect of journalism as being part of the total experience of "reading" ... *Oz*' (Nelson 1989: 56). A non-sectarian perspective was best proclaimed in this format, since graphically, *Oz* could play down any traditional political arguments. Conversely, the ideology of hedonism was better exemplified in this playful format. Black and white format papers could, in their content, articulate similar ideas about alternative lifestyles, but *Oz* could do so colourfully. Contemporary criticism of *Oz* from both the revolutionary left and the establishment surrounded these issues of presentation, noting that it perhaps obscured some of this lifestyle's more dubious assumptions about sexuality behind a veneer of playful and childish innocence. Adding to the confusion, each issue was different. Throughout its run, *Oz* produced a gay issue, a revolutionary issue, a women's liberation issue, an Agitprop issue, a comic strip issue and so on. But each of these positions was presented in a similarly playful manner and cooled-down so that their ideological messages were subsumed by the editorial and graphical presentation. For instance, Gay *Oz* (*Oz* 23, August 1969) which was produced to coincide with the Isle of Wight festival and consequently sold well: It was the first issue which one of the popular underground's few gay activists, Jim Anderson had been involved with. The issue deliberately set out to shock with images, but unlike the contemporary gay press in the city (for example, *Come Together* which began publishing in Camden in 1969), it did not enter into any deep analysis of the cultural politics of homosexuality. Predictably, *Oz* was elusive about its commitment to any platform, although gay rights fitted with a belief in sexual freedom and the sexual revolution. The women's liberation issue (*Oz* 29, October 1970) subtitled 'Cunt Power' and guest edited by Germaine Greer whilst containing thought provoking articles on the politics of gender and sexuality women active in the underground was also undermined by the graphics.

The methods of presentation and organisation of the text of *Oz* also reflected notions about the assault on the word and language current throughout the 1960s in London. Issue 10 of March 1968 entitled 'The Pornography of Violence' for instance offered the readers the chance to perform their own cut-up. Pages throughout were split horizontally into three by scored lines with the invitation to create your own text and combination of texts using scissors and sellotape. No direct reference is made to the Burroughs method but some of the text, particularly the feature article 'Conversation' which cut-up and spliced in a variety of quotes

on direct political involvement verses play power to simulate a dialogue, owes much to the cut-up technique. The next issue of *Oz*, in April 1968 'broke new graphic territory' (Fountain 1988: 58) with a cover comprising of day-glo stickers carrying a variety of humorous and revolutionary slogans and emblems. Inside this issue, there is a similar theme, attacking traditional political dogma, with a parody of the *New Statesman* aided in fact by two *New Statesman* contributors, Alexander Cockburn and Tom Nairn.

Oz was at the forefront of adopting linguistic innovations that emerged from London's counterculture. 'Language was reinvented, as was music, philosophy, art, morality, justice, truth, and the rest of the Greek transcendentals, each received psychedelic rebirth and transfiguration' (Jasha 1970: 5). Frequently, the words redefined existing words in which dominant meanings were subverted, occasionally borrowing from other languages. *Oz* 6 presented the article 'Rosetalk' by Anthony Burgess – famous at the time for developing alternative subcultural dialect in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) – which gave the latest 'in-terms' or 'endoglosses' appearing in the hippy community of London SW1. Burgess notes that although 'Hippy language is, in terms of the English speaking community and even beyond, pretty well universal ... There are inevitably, local variants' (Burgess 1967: 22). Adopting new nomenclatures from the movement in this way was influenced by William Burroughs's deconditioning tactics. Burroughs, who, as we have seen, was quite closely associated with the London counterculture in the late 1960s, theorised that language was a structuring device for reality. Change the language and the reality would also change. An alternative reality required then a destabilisation and subordination of language. But the effect of this innovatory language and graphic presentation did not liberate or decondition the individual from the overbearing structures of society so much as point up the absurdity of the establishment. The prosecution of the *Oz* trail in 1971 which was more concerned with the presentation of images and the structure of language than what was an essentially innocuous content is evidence of this.

Oz's Map of the Underground: Play Power

Editorial policy was fairly consistent in *Oz* so that even after the enforced departure of Richard Neville, or when other writing commitments meant the magazine was edited by Germaine Greer, Felix Dennis, David Widgery or others, the ethics of what Neville termed 'Play Power' informed the magazine's ideological outlook. This was the case in spite of the magazine's content since, although much space was given to hard-line radical political features, reflecting shifts in the orientation of the underground generally, the format of *Oz* was always playful and concerned with challenging established modes of expression, ideological or aesthetic.

Richard Neville described his concept of Play Power in a book of the same name published in 1970. Following an exchange of letters in the *New Statesman*, Neville received a £3,000 advance from Jonathan Cape to produce the book.

Jonathan Cape would later advertise *Play Power* in the underground press as 'The Revolutionary Hand Book, 38s, Buy or steal it', accompanied by photograph of a Hell's Angel posing as Richard Neville. This was a common ploy by Neville. He had previously got people to stand in for him at interviews and photography sessions with the mainstream media, notably when David Widgery sat in as Neville on a television programme about the underground which was later shelved, and when the *People* newspaper interviewed him at the *Oz* office in 1969. At this interview, Lee Heater, an itinerant Hippy lawyer who had taken LSD and was later jailed for child abuse, posed for the press shots and confirmed the establishment's worst fears about the underground. Each of these events were recounted in *Oz* magazine and the *People* interview was reproduced in full. At 38 shillings though, *Play Power* was probably beyond the means of regular hippies: 'It is a bit too spicy for your coffee table and a little too expensive for yer orange box. Pass it on to your parents' (Avery 1970).

In *Play Power* (1970) Neville attempted to articulate a new political stance that paid little heed to established political systems or recognisable political practices:

> The actions of the New Left are said to be 'political'. The antics of the Underground are said to be 'cultural'. In fact, both sociological manifestations are part of the behaviour patterns of a single discontented body. The days of nine to five radicalisation are over. The hippie who has brown rice for breakfast, and the student who burns his examination paper are both learning to live the same revolution. (Richard Neville 1970: 19)

Neville's cultural politics were in part inspired by the Yippies and their McLuhan-like media manipulation, and, like a number of people in underground London, he believed that the blending politics and lifestyle was fundamental to effective underground dissent. A year before the publication of *Play Power*, John Gerassi wrote on 'Living the Revolution' in *Oz* 21 (June 1969) in a similar manner: 'No party? No ideology? No program? How in hell then do we make this "humanising" revolution? By living it. By fighting for what's relevant to you, not some theoretist [sic]' (Gerassi 1969: 18).

Although the notion that play was the most effective form of revolt can be identified as a further stage in a tradition of rebellion with the express purpose of undermining the protestant work ethic (Nelson 1989: 85), Neville's reworking of the concept in Play Power was specifically 'post-scarcity'. Psychoanalyst Joel Whitebrook explored this aspect of the theory in his *Oz* 43 review of Murray Bookchin's *Post-scarcity Anarchism*. Once nature was fully pacified and automation brought an end to the necessity to toil, the 'self can rediscover the natural world as a source of sustenance and delight'. In the community, the self could find a 'playground in which to explore its imaginative, erotic, and aesthetic potentialities' (Whitebrook 1972: 20). *Oz* often featured articles envisioning a workless and workerless society, where automation would ultimately liberate the individual and realise the full potential of play. In *Oz* 17 (January 1969) the idea

is reworked in an article by Marxian philosopher David Ramsay-Steele, in which he proposed the abolition of money, since potentially liberating automation was motivated by profit, but 'without profit system, work could be made enjoyable' (Ramsay-Steele 1968: 27). *Oz* in general however was not explicit in its coverage of the theory of playful revolt but its style and format tended to project the same message: 'Play in *Oz*, was something visible, or to be experienced, rather than dutifully presented' (Nelson 1989: 89).

There was, then, some contemporaneous intellectual justification for this editorial direction. In Marshall McLuhan's media theory for example, there was scope for the notion of play which broke down accepted values and redefined spatial, temporal and neurological meanings (Morgan 1990: 22–25). McLuhan's work was self-consciously satirical, particularly when dealing with the mechanical phase of modern technology and the presentation of some of his work owes much to the sixties' zeitgeist of play. *Counterblast* (1970) used many of the techniques employed by *Oz* to transmit its message, suggesting that there was some form of an aesthetic dialogue between the underground press and McLuhan. Written under the maxim that 'Good taste is the first refuge of the witless', *Counterblast* said very little that McLuhan had not said before, but said it in a innovative, non-linear (or at least anti-linear) way, true to its message, exploiting the same offset photo-lithography as the underground press. Fonts, styles, colours and illustrations were mixed in an attempt to break down the linear form of print technology, so that his medium complemented his message. For Ferguson (1991), however, it was in *Counterblast* that McLuhan actually became the victim of the 1960s zeitgeist, a 'casualty of "with it" layout and lettering, diluting his weak prose further with weak images', resulting in a message which was 'neither hot nor cool but lukewarm' (Ferguson 1991: 78). *Oz* was also not without criticism for contemporary media theory, however. Significantly, *Oz* 6, the first psychedelic and underground issue, before an advert for McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), published a feature article, 'Marchall Mclewan's Wun Ied Kingdom', which made a pre-emptive strike on the McLuhan, 'the new cult figure', anticipating that everyone would drop him as they had Colin Wilson: In Madison Avenue, Greenwich Village and Bloomsbury, McLuhan was 'semi-canonised, an oracle' (*Oz* 6 1967: 29). The critique argues for the importance of content in media and exposes the hypocrisy in the linearity of McLuhan's argument with its ultimate goal of media format always in mind.

Play Power set itself up as the manifesto of the London underground press and its production, directing this new style of communication and ideas. But the new language of dissent was not monotonic: underground papers were 'pugnaciously partisan and each reporter was in a sense his own editorialist' (Neville 1970: 127). Neville, whilst never declaring himself a 'hippy', preferring 'acid socialist' instead, was cynical about 'Big Ideas' which drove him to insist that the content of *Oz* be diverse, contradictory and satirical. Even in an issue of *Oz* dedicated to revolt, 'Revolutionary *Oz*' (January 1968), David Widgery misspelt Guevara as 'Geuvara' throughout although he claimed that this was by accident following

vehement criticism from the city's left. Such an apparent lack of editorial control was meant to inject play into political activism: 'give Marx a joint and ask Buddha what he's going to tell the tree executioners' (Neville 1973a: 56). In this sense, *Oz* was neither totally hedonistic, nor entirely radical. Again, this concept drew lessons from the Yippies who in their cultural politics strove to abolish the distinction between theory and action, challenging not only the hypocrisies of the Pentagon, but also the 'dogged, atavistic weekend seminar ploy of the stoical New Left' (Neville 1970: 40). The New Left had created the teach-in, the hippie had created the Be-In, and the Yippie, born at the Pentagon but 'developing in the womb of Mother America since the late 1950s', was 'creating the do-in or live-in' (Rubin 1968: 9). Every situation was viable for selling the Yippie message, each was a chance to 'project to the children of the world our secret fantasies a la McLuhan' (Rubin 1969). Yippies were leading by the example of 'do-your-own-thing-or-fuck-you', and if the working-class saw them having such a good time, then they would follow, without the need for a patronising New Left (Buckman 1968: 31–32). Neville identified a more 'political', more 'militant' attitude in British hippies as police intervened in demonstrations and love-ins. This militancy was not expressed he observed, in a violent way, nor in the direct actions of the New Left, but manifested itself in an attempt to analyse the causes of any situation, or in other words, 'getting our minds beyond the "hip" fashionable copy-cat sort of revolution' (Neville 1972: 11). The ultimate expression of this critical analysis would be in the underground press as Neville conceived it.

For the Yippies, understanding media after McLuhan was a crucial weapon – they relied on distortion of all forms of media and exploited it for its 'myth making potential', resolutely 'weaving a seductive spell of fiction and fantasy which, by the very act of publication, gained a compelling credibility' (Neville 1970: 53–54). A politics which would fuse an instinctive comprehension of the workings of mass communication with direct action presented not an isolated political programme, but an alternative way of life, and this 'merging of politics and way of life is fundamental to the underground' (Neville 1970: 62). Such a revolutionary doctrine abandoned the New Left's materialist goal of mobilising the working-class which implicitly venerated the sanctity of work – a legacy from its Old Left roots. For undergrounders, as opposed to radical leftists, the rhetoric of dissent centred on play and the media because 'grubby Marxist leaflets and hand-me-down rhetoric won't put an end to toil. It will be an irresistible fun-possessed play-powered counterculture' (Neville 1970: 258).

This breaking down of categories would also destroy the distinction between work and play, work becoming play and vice versa, where the territories of each activity were obscured and redefined. For Neville, the production of the magazine itself was emblematic of this transgression in the way that it 'blurred the division between work and play' (Richard Neville in Green 1988: 144). Play Power manifested itself in *Oz* in terms of a scatological format and style. This was a distinctive feature of a popular countercultural ideology, and one which was particularly dominant in London. As a monthly publication, *Oz* was unable to

effectively cover breaking news stories. Consequently, a few stories were covered in depth or explored for any relevant ideological aspects. But the ways in which these items were presented – in garish colours, frequently illegible, adorned with exotic graphics, or written in a peculiar language – had a tendency to exclude: 'Someone once claimed that it was deliberate because "only young people have eyesight good enough to read it"' (Sarler 1991: 18). Some criticised this approach, not least David Widgery and Germaine Greer, for obscuring revolutionary or radically new content. In this way, the 'great majority' were put off by 'misprints, overprinting and pressgrams', and will tend not to read anything 'litho-ed yellow on orange' (Williams 1968: 26).

The Underground Left in *Oz*

Many of the radical political articles featured in *Oz* expressed an exacerbation with this lack of identity or unified image. Editorial policy meant that these articles lost the impact of their messages by being 'played down' in Neville's term, or cooled-down in McLuhan's, the presentation of the text detracting from and contradicting those messages. David Widgery was a regular victim of this, particularly in earlier articles. His contributions are illuminating in the way they present the views of the New Left faction of the underground on the pages of an essentially hippy magazine. 'Played-out', his critical review of Neville's recently published *Play Power* which appeared in *Oz* 26, deconstructs the whole Play Power concept as 'Penis Power'. The 'hippy chick' was one of the most 'unfree' women, assigned to being ethereal, knowing about Tarot and the phases of the moon, but 'busy cooking, answering the phone' in various underground enterprises, and 'rolling her master's joint' (Widgery 1970a: 44). This was a powerful and convincing argument, but *Oz*'s editors played down the content of Widgery's critique, superimposing the text onto a picture of a naked North-American Indian couple in a back-to-nature scene, incorporating a cartoon caricatures of socialists and Trotskyites, and an illustration of a space cadet travelling towards a Milky Way of garbage.

As the editor of a few issues, David Widgery was given more leeway, allowing him to be less hindered in his criticisms of the Play Power ethic, and the way it amplified the discourse of Swinging London with its reliance on de-contextualised, de-politicised hollow images and shallow lifestyles. 'There are people starving in London but they are certainly not Richard Neville and Mick Farren ... to simply turn Vietnam into nothing much more than a Special Effects Department for your autobiography, and guerrilla soldiers into cute visuals is just as false and ends up just another short cut to nowhere' (Widgery 1970b: 5).

David Widgery was neither a wholehearted student radical, nor an *Oz*nik. Throughout, he reconciled his loyalties to Marxism and the International Socialist group with a passion for R&B music and sexual liberation, a blend which arose from his involvement with CND's Aldermaston marches in the late 1950s and early 1960s, where he imbibed their 'carnival of subversion', whilst remaining a
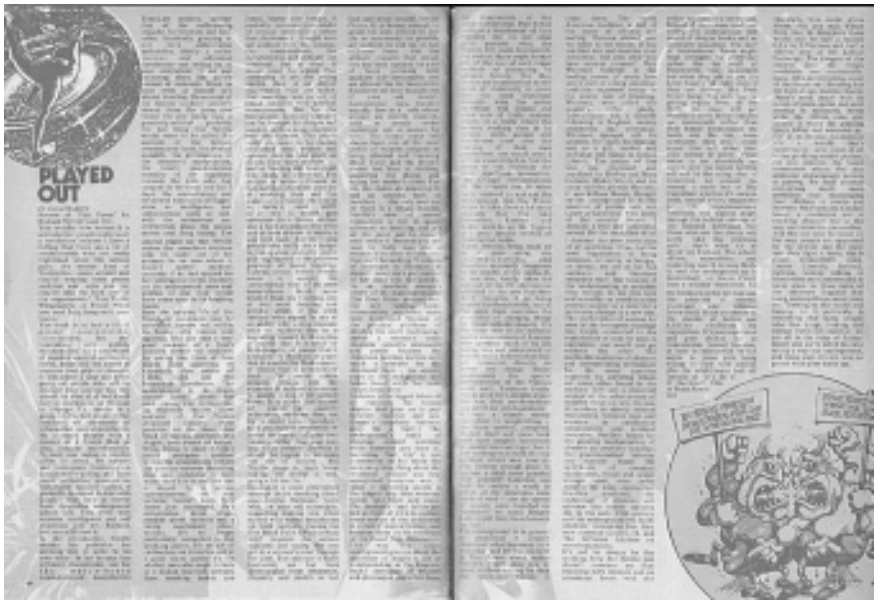
Figure 7.5   **David Widgery's 'played-down' review of *Play Power* from *Oz* 26 (January 1970: 44–45)**

Source: Underground Press.

committed Marxist. He had then interests in both sides of London's counterculture, as an activist in the East End and as a hippy columnist in the West: 'The number 22 bus goes from Hackney to the Worlds End and intellectually I was going backwards and forwards in the same way ... When I got fed up with the Left I'd go and be a bit psychedelic for a while' (David Widgery in Green 1988: 41 and 147). But he was always convinced from his work with the community in the East End as a doctor, of the need to engage the working-class of London in the struggle, and in an appropriate manner. He wrote in *Oz* 13 (June 1968) of the way Acid hippies, progressive bohemians and 'bored pop entrepreneurs' all used the language of total liberation, but were not willing to practice its logical dictates. London's underground community was pacified by their ritual sacraments. Indeed, 'the more the underground loons on about revolution, the more obvious it becomes that pot serves roughly the same social role that gin did in the thirties ... The JCR's are voting their money to the picket line not the pantomime' (Widgery 1968a: 19). It was the underground's obsession with image and an insistence on the irrelevance of ideology that most concerned Widgery. For him, London's counterculture and specifically the *Oz*niks had chosen style as value, the 'ethic of the strutting Beautiful Person attacking the modern state where it likes, not where it hurts ... if you eat health foods, you must expect to look like a banana' (Widgery 1967a: 23). To be dangerously threatening to capitalism, 'you have to do more than spell it

with a K' (Widgery 1970b: 4). Favourably reviewing Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* (1968) in *Oz* 17 (January 1969), Widgery sympathised with Nuttall's suspicion of the bourgeois romanticism of the 'photogenic world of the hippies', but accepted it as a passing but necessary phase, 'just as Narodnikism was prior to Bolshevism' (Widgery 1968b: 29).

In the early 1970s as London's counterculture began to wane, Widgery was concerned that the revolutionary potential should not get subsumed into the mediocrity that the counterculture had become. Like Swinging London, an image-based revolt was ultimately up for cooption, fetishising the icons of true revolution in the packaging of 'pop songs' and 'pretty clothes'. 'The idea that the simpering Batboys of pop are in fact the Archangels of revolutionary change ought finally to expire in the face of the Apple saga wherein one John Lennon, a hard, sarky, rock singer turns into a quietist TV celebrity & lived happily opening Oxfam bazaars & repelling takeover bids' (Widgery 1969a: 25). And in May/June 1972, he wrote: 'While the underground sets about a summer of more ludicrous clothes, more repressive festivals and more archaic rock records than ever before, we are living through one of the most revolutionary periods in British history since ... 1948' (Widgery 1972: 26). It was the surplus produced by the workers that Widgery and other Marxists in the London counterculture like the *Black Dwarf* columnist and Agitprop activist John Hoyland believed gave the 'freaks' the leisure to live this 'exemplary existence', and it was a political party that was required to enshrine the countercultural left's consciousness so that it might be transferred from struggle to struggle in the future. But for both Widgery and Hoyland, the strictures of Marxism whilst useful, were not wholly practical, Marxists did not lead by example. Both Libertarians and Marxists shared visions of a classless society 'without states, without drudgery, without alienation'. Such a world would afford everyone the possibility to 'develop themselves to the limit of their potential', 'a world were work, art, pleasure and play [become] virtually indistinguishable' (Hoyland 1972: 27).

The Elusive Underground

A more common opinion aired in the pages of *Oz* promoted the message of the editor, and contradicted the content of the radical left and Marxists features: 'The left wing groups do inject a certain amount of all-round theory into the struggle. But it is too retrospective, not visionary enough' (Jigsaw 1971: 34). Throughout *Oz*'s run therefore, greater scope was afforded in both text and presentation, to features on the Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters, the Yippies, interviews with countercultural gurus and so on. And, although the content of *Oz* at first sight appears varied in its cultural political outlook, within the underground, the magazine clearly represented the popular faction of the counterculture. In a tangible sense, the medium was the message here. The presentation of articles was informed by Neville's concept of Play Power, in spite of their content. Play Power in turn was informed by a variety

of perspectives and theories concerned with de-categorisation (the breaking down of ideological and aesthetic categories) many of which have been discussed in the last few chapters. Features and articles appearing that assumed categories transposed from the 'straight' world, be they political, historical or otherwise, were accordingly contradicted throughout by their setting and context. In effect, this context 'played down' the oppositional views expressed in the text alone, allowing the magazine to constantly elude categorisation.

For Germaine Greer, this elusiveness afforded tactical advantages. The underground could avoid appropriation by wilfully not presenting a coherent image. In an article for *Oz* 22, she addressed some problems that could occur in fixing this underground landscape, as more and more elaborate schemes were devised to prevent appropriation by the 'overground'. Working the underground/overground metaphor, she described the overground as the asphalt crust over the humus or matrix of life that was the underground. Where the underground appeared overground, it was known as dirt and used as a repository for waste: 'Most things that live in it [the underground] communicate by smell and feel ... They crawl and grope in the humming darkness, their unmapped, unremembered paths intersecting occasionally and tunnelling on. No signposts because there are no strangers and nothing to point at' (Greer 1969: 4). This large organisational network of tunnels was impossible to trace even if intersected. Because the underground became so elusive so as to avoid exploitation, the task of appropriating a map was made equally difficult: 'the Underground remains uncharted, unreliable, unrewarding, and irresponsible' (Greer 1969: 4). Signs of internal dissention and sectarian infighting within the underground, which the Establishment may have hoped were indicators of imminent collapse, were only signs of 'continuing life: Complacency and inertia are qualities prized only by the Establishment' (Greer 1969: 4).

In working this metaphor Greer was expressing a common countercultural trope in which the poetic, symbolic and historical weight of the term 'underground' was exploited. It is evident in a number of publications and in the ideas of some of the people who inspired the counterculture. London's hippy underground would frequently deploy the metaphorical tension between the aerial and the terrestrial, in particular portraying a chaotic, disordered, irrational and unmappable underground in diametric opposition to an ordered, rational and increasingly technocratic overground. This was the same metaphorical deployment of 'underground' that found expression in countercultural favourites such as Jack Kerouac's 'study' of the San Francisco Beats in *The Subterraneans* (1958) and indeed Dostoyevsky's underground man. Assigned to the underground metaphor are notions of withdrawal, threat, artistic purity and conspiracy, of the underground as a link in, and the facilitator of, an exclusive community identity with a language and folklore of its own, and of the underground as an engine for social and cultural transformation.

Timothy Leary's psychotropic-inspired manifesto for the counterculture, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1968) exploited the metaphor too. For him, like many other commentators radical or otherwise, the underground had a place in the progression

of culture and the struggle for civilization itself. Like root and branch, the two symbiotic cultures of overground and underground had always existed within civil society. An underground of drop-outs was protected by camouflage, where elusive 'knowledge is experimental, whispered word-of-mouth, friend to friend and rarely written down' (Leary 1990: 161). Its corollary, the overground, was obsessively organised and forever striving for material control. For Leary, this 'ancient duality' had reached an 'evolutionary crisis point' in the late 1960s. The underground in his reading was at the vanguard of long-lasting changes in culture and society, an 'ecstatic upheaval from below – Christ, Buddha, Mohammed – then slowly a new hierarchy emerges' (Leary 1990: 162).

Activists within and patriarchs of the counterculture then, were conscious of the history and the continuum of subterranean revolt against the establishment and forces of oppression into which they fitted. Members of these subversive groups were perceived by the counterculture's elite to have devoted their existence to a challenging of established norms and enhanced the 'flow of culture's progress'. The new movement was not unlike the French impressionists or the early Christians; they followed the same quest for 'a unified existence within the natural structure of evolution, a quest towards peace and knowledge for all men' (Burns, 1968, p.209). More conventional histories at the time too, perhaps in an effort to take the sting out of the counterculture and to calm rising moral panic, emphasised this dualism and the ways in which the counterculture could be located within a long history of subterranean revolt. Typically such accounts concluded like Anthony Esler in *Bombs Beards and Barricades* (1971) that 'everything our insurrectionary youth have tried – from New Left militance to hippie-style withdrawal from society, from the campus revolt to the commune movement has been tried before' (Esler 1971: 7). The same bearded, angry young man was present in post-waterloo Germany as a radical student and he could be found over a century later marching with the vanguard of the Hitler Youth in the 1930s. The Russian Nihilists (the underground man) of the 1860s developed and deployed the basic structure and tactics of underground revolt, splitting into elusive cells, producing underground papers and agitating amongst the wider community. And with the French Bohemian of the 1830s similar structures were also evident in the Latin Quarter of Paris, with a deliberate deployment of the labyrinthine fabric of the Quarter for the purposes of Bohemian dissent, developing an exclusive dress code, language and lifestyle, and creating a distinctive subculture. Indeed, this was a 'fully developed counter-culture united by bonds of ideological commitment, by values and views of the world totally antithetical to those of their society' (Esler 1971: 87–88). For 1960s radicals, then, there were certain models to draw upon, underground insurrections and previous countercultures throughout modern history, whose lifestyle and the protest it embodied, remained 'essentially the same' (Esler 1971: 29).

Technology and Nature Mysticism

In emphasising and reinforcing Play Power in its editorial approach, *Oz* claimed the ascendancy of the immaterial and mythical over the material and ideological. A mistrust in ideological and political categories and their ways of representing the material world gave rise to this outlook. In this case, where features dealt with issues like transcendental religions or pharmacological and organic sacraments, the content of the articles complemented their presentation. Martin Sharp's occasional pictures and poster issues for instance drew on an interpretation of Celtic myth and style and a veneration of tribal society. In the United States, the Native American tribes were the subject of a considerable renaissance as they were in Britain, but in Britain, this interest was complemented by a resurgence of curiosity in all things Celtic, drawing on an indigenous tribal society whose lifestyle was informed by a mythical/magical relationship with nature and the land, a pre-Newtonian cosmology in some regards not dissimilar from the counterculture's reading of the post-Newtonian one.

J.R.R. Tolkien's influential re-casting of Celtic style and mythology is readily apparent too, not only in the style of presentation in *Oz* but also in the reported lifestyle of London's underground. With clubs like Gandalf's Garden and Middle Earth popularising these images, it is not surprising to learn that Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was 'absolutely the favourite book of every hippie' (Hinkle 1967: 8). Gandalf's Garden was also the title of a short lived underground paper in London which published six issues at the height of popularity for this type of hippy mysticism between 1968 and 1969. It took the imagery and mysticism to extremes in a serious (but also often ironic) attempt to affect the cultural politics in the city's counterculture:

> While hobbits sit oblivious in the Shire, the Gandalfs and Striders of the world are working furiously to save the planet from extinction and to bring about the *Golden Age*. It will come. Things are happening behind the scenes, even in the bastions of Greyworld. Overcome negativity and begin to live the future *now* within yourself. Build the vibrations in the Earth-soul, and the world as we wish it will come into being. (Anon 1969: 4)

Tolkien's creation of a new mythology in an imagined world with its prehistoric, almost primordial qualities appealed to the counterculture. Hinkle examined this attraction in an *Oz* article, explaining how Hobbits were hedonistic, happy people who loved beauty and pretty colours, they resented intrusions and 'pass the time eating three or four meals a day and smoke burning leaves of herb in pipes of clay. You can see why hippies would like Hobbits' (Hinkle 1967: 8).

Features on transcendentalism and new consciousness were not only complemented by the graphic strategies developed by *Oz*, but also of course in their discourse. References were made for instance to a subconscious connected with ancient societies (Darnton 1970: 11), to transcendentalism and features on

synthesised hallucinogenic substances and various eastern gurus and philosophies. They have in common the complement of artwork and presentation reinforcing the messages. To provide intellectual rigour to these sorties into mysticism, there were a number of features that examined the theories of prominent social scientists and psychologists including R.D. Laing and Carl Jung. Commonly these articles attempted to analyse theories in terms of the way that they, like the underground press, explored beyond rationalist, lineal verbal systems for direct experience of life through altered perceptions. One of these, on Jung, outlined similarities between the way that both the hippies and Jung privileged the realms of imagination and fantasy. Of particular interest here was his work on parapsychology and the explanation of non-physical, immaterial phenomenon, of the apparent removal of the logic of cause and effect whereby Jung seemed to recast the laws of nature, to include an the accidental variant, 'the chance factor, when we know without cause what has happened or what will happen somewhere' (Hoffman 1971: 19). The unification of all experience, both human and material, led to a relationship between the psychic world and all matter (nature). Clearly, even when such pieces seem to take unhindered magical flights of fancy, they still retained at least a small element of the influential discourses of modern cosmology that have been discussed throughout the book.

Whilst *Oz* helped construct and convey a magical geography to the British counterculture then, this was tempered by reference to rational technoscience. In coverage of Timothy Leary's mission to 'turn-on' the world to LSD for instance, which was well reported through syndication, the magical qualities of LSD's transcendental effects were emphasised alongside the modern scientific aspects of the drugs synthesis, emphasising its mythological and alchemical nature: 'The sacred mushrooms and other neurological botanical gifts are pre-scientific gratuitous gifts. LSD and other synthetics have more alchemical and neurological meaning' (Leary 1972: 6). Visual and theoretical technology, through envisioning nature and its processes anew, were in fact also aiding the development of a new mysticism amongst the counterculture around nature and its apprehension. Neville, in the final issue of *Oz*, noted that, despite the demise of the counterculture, its legacy would lie in this precisely this kind of spiritual reawakening. New ways to explore the universe of inner space captured the 'best minds of our generation', exited them with 'new Skylabs of the mind' (Neville 1973a: 56). Whilst intellectuals had had their spirit numbed by years of immersion in 'expedient doctrines of empiricism, rationality and objectivity', ironically, 'pioneers of the new mysticism' were all 'defectors from the shrine of academic methodology – Carlos Casteneda, ... Richard Alpert ... and Timothy Leary' (Neville 1973a: 56). Conceptions of nature and a consciousness of new human–nature relationships were redrawn in the pages of *Oz*. Through technological advance, mythologies were re-invented, re-used and applied to the evolution of a single consciousness into which the natural, material world was integrated. This was, then, a reassertion of a mysticism aided by new systems of communication and new modes of expression, transcending modern objective categories of ideology and culture and at one with what Neville set out in *Play Power*.

The new consciousness of cosmic nature embraced by the London counterculture found voice too in the numerous features on the practical application of countercultural philosophies. These reports ranged from the use of TV and Video through communal structures, to diet. Each had in common a notion of consciousness which enveloped the material world of nature and reflected a belief in the inadequacy of a purely materialistic interpretation of the universe, which tipped the mood from 'vague empiricism to rampant subjective exploration' (Neville 1973b: 3). Whether they were concerned with the Yippy adoption of McLuhan's media theories or the use of film in achieving altered states of consciousness, each of these kinds of features and reports also represented a practical experiment to physically construct the imaginative geography of Play Power.

At the heart of the new magical geography was a particular way of seeing nature as an integral to consciousness. Paradoxically, the regenerative process of the counterculture took place in urban areas in the form of underground papers, clubs and events:

> The city is the self, the suburbs are the static neurosis that surround and confuse the modern self. Beyond this lies the country, which is to say, nature that has not been covered with asphalt. Out here I've begun to relate to things, stars, lizards, my body, sunshine, winds, plants ... nature. The rhythm of my life is more real. (Sandy 1970)

But the urban environment was also where the renaissance of the human spirit, so central to the concept of 'play' and Play Power could occur, because it afforded contact and communion with a variety of human experiences. But the 'nature' that was in question here was not simply the nature of rural flora and fauna, but nature as physical process and force as it was rendered theoretically. This was not spatially bound to one or another environment.

By far the most prominent topic for reports on the practical application of this cultural politics was an examination of the various ways in which humanity could live in ecosystemic harmony. Despite the emergence of more radical elements in the counterculture after 1967–8, *Oz* continued to address these issues throughout its run. 'Mother' earth and nature were reclaimed as an integral to the new cosmic consciousness, so it followed that, those who 'do no greening of themselves will hardly bring about the greening of America' (Watts 1971). The cultural politics of this cosmic nature-consciousness emerged especially in accounts of experimental communitarian schemes. Practitioners hoped the distinction between work and play would dissolve in rural and urban communes and, like the popular underground in London and for similar reasons, criticised the more conventional political elements of the counterculture for their mechanistic, linear logic: 'They [the politicos] must learn what it means to say "this moment, this feeling, this idea, this beauty exists in and for itself". And they must learn that, without this dimension, their revolution is in danger of being merely a mechanical change ... Such a revolution would fail to liberate men's deeper nature' (Jigsaw 1970: 8).

Drawing on Bookchin, this commune with nature would mean that work could be transformed from a wasteful, resentment-engendering imposition into a 'fulfilling, trust engendering universally part-time experience' (Jigsaw 1970: 8). It was in the alienation from a society whose existence relied on the concept of work that the 'politicos' and the 'freaks' converged experientially, but in their respective attitudes to the work ethic that they diverged. The left had a romanticised attitude to labouring and toil, whereas the hippies celebrated creative play above all else. The demands of the communal hippies, whilst apparently venerating the mystical qualities of cultivation and the cycle of nature, were represented as inherently rational: 'In a rationally arranged society, using modern technological resources, we could all have our physical needs and desires taken care of even if everyone worked only 15 hours per week' (Jigsaw 1970: 7). In this sense, the revolt of the hippies was 'cultural, not just material' and the most significant aspect of the hippy movement was its immersion in cultural variety: 'The variety of human possibility, instead of being shunned or "contained", is celebrated and imbibed' (Jigsaw 1971: 35). Moreover, commune with the 'natural' need not and frequently did not take place in a rural setting. Numerous rural communes closed during their first winter because of food shortages, the cold, and resultant aggravated relationships between members. But urban spaces proved in fact be a more 'natural' setting for this kind of living arrangement, since it was only in the city that human possibilities could be properly celebrated: 'It is here that the largest number of people live, and the widest range of human development occurs ... that a pattern of communal living can develop which is based on toleration for this wide range of life experience' (Meyer 1971: 19).

For some, the differentiation between rural and urban would become an 'insignificant distinction in an era of total communication' (Jasha 1970: 4). A republished lecture by sociologist Victor Jasha that appears in *Oz* 27 (February 1970) for instance, adapted some of McLuhan's ideas to work through the ways in which psychedelics could be considered primitive psychochemical machines – extensions of our central nervous systems – by which the new generation sought to master a new range of societal forces. Psychedelics then were also used to verify this techno-ecological awareness. McLuhan's retribalisation process was identified in the accommodation that youth culture made to its new electronic environment in the form of the underground and the development of communes was viewed as a natural response to the age of 'electric sociogenisis'. Newfound relationships with the natural and material worlds through the use of psychedelics, coupled with the development of an electronic global village it was hoped, would inform the evolving social structures of the counterculture.

Metropolitan Global Consciousness

The language, presentation and overall style of *Oz* magazine owed something to American publications as well as to the experiments in media, art and theatre in Britain during the 1960s. As London's underground community developed, it

abandoned English provincial culture and increasingly took on board the concerns of the American underground – Vietnam was better reported in most underground publications than Northern Ireland for instance. This shift in perspective also brought with it different stylistic influences from psychedelia to Beat writing. American underground figures had a direct affect on the London scene: Allen Ginsberg for instance was in London for one of the first countercultural events in the Albert Hall; William Burroughs produced a series of deconditioning films, wrote for the London underground press, and maintained a high profile in the city throughout the 1960s; John Wilcock, editor of New York's *East Village Other* and editor/author of the global *Other Scenes*, ultimately effected the development of *Oz* as an art form. Similarly, syndication through the UPS ensured that information on the United States was more readily available than say, information about the scene in Leeds. In outlook, style and content, *Oz* then was globalised but at the same time thoroughly metropolitan.

The ethics of Play Power permeate *Oz*'s representation of the global and local underground and its use of various ideologies and ancient lifestyles. The benefits of a global consciousness facilitated by expanded communications made other cultures more apparent and relevant to the experience and construction of the underground's imagined geography. Such influences were plundered for their applicability to *Oz*'s conception of underground revolt, but rarely taken

Figure 7.6   Another sample of the *Oz* aesthetic, in this case Jack Kerouac's obituary written by David Widgery and published in *Oz* 25 (December 1969: 40–41)

Source: Underground Press.

as anything other than a refreshingly new image or style. For Neville, this was quite apt, *Oz* always retained a satirical edge, never committing itself fully to one ideology. There was a serious cultural politics in this kind of flippancy that was well expressed on a flier advertising an Independence Day celebration as part of the protests surrounding the *Oz* Trial:

> …it has finally dawned upon us that the authorities in this country take our publishing venture far more seriously than we do … OZ has relentlessly promoted some elements of the new culture – dope, rock 'n' roll and fucking in the streets; it is the only magazine in this country to consistently and constructively analyse the tension between the freak/dropout community and the militant left and to struggle to develop a theory from such antagonism. We see fun, flippancy, guiltless sex and the permanent strike of dropping out as part of an emerging new community … We appreciate that OZ antics are often adventuristic, escapist, dilettantish, narcissistic and juvenile; but we are congenitally incapable of facing a solemn fun free future, cutting cane beneath some Spartan banner of liberation. We want to play with our toys, not own them …

The character and cultural politics of the largest faction of London's counterculture is also well defined in this deliberately provocative statement, which perhaps explains why *Oz* magazine has become the first point of reference for those wanting to paint a picture of late 1960s and early 1970s countercultural London. But the ideas and philosophies expressed explicitly or aesthetically and graphically in *Oz* were also however deployed in innovative and far less textual form of cultural politics in the city at the same time in the form of the multi-media lightshow. Some of the graphic innovations contained in *Oz* were in fact also influenced by this performance aesthetic as it evolved globally and in London throughout the late 1960s. The next chapter focuses upon these practices.

Chapter 8
Lightshows and Multi-media Environments: Cosmic Connections and the Countercultural Subject

> The Universe is a self-regenerating and transforming organic machine. Human womb graduates now gestating within the biosphere's world industrial organism womb are discovering and employing a few of the principles governing micro–macro cosmic mechanics, all the while ignorantly speaking of their accomplishments of the generally-disregarded obvious as 'inventions' and 'creations.' Now humans have become suspicious of their little machines, blaming them for the continual disconnects of the inexorable evolutionary processes of cosmic gestations which – transcendental to their brain detecting – ever and again emit them into a greater, more inclusively exquisite spherical environment of automated mechanical controls that progressively decontrol humanity's thought and action capabilities – ever increasing humanity's options – emancipating it from its former almost total preoccupation with absolute survival factors (Buckminster Fuller 1970: 22–23).

Towards the end of the previous chapter I explored some of the more mystical and perhaps more stereotypically hippy aspects of the London counterculture's cultural politics as they found expression in *Oz*. This chapter picks up on some of these themes but re-emphasises that much of the mysticism that we typically associate with the counterculture was tempered by reference to scientific advance and technoscientific discourse. This discourse, as we have seen elsewhere, was used to explain and help define non-linear forms of thought and action. Even when an underground press article concerned something apparently thoroughly mystical such as Atlantis or the explanation of the alignment of the great pyramids, the coverage was often grounded in contemporary ideas about energy, nature and matter: 'The Great Pyramid … was designed and used to the specifications of a tremendous and mysterious scientific system that had at its heart the finely balanced regulation of telluric and cosmic energy currents and their effects upon living matter' (Roberts 1972: 25).

The underground press also carried reviews of the latest thinking on space and time as well as the potential psychosocial and anthropological effects of space–time philosophies in a range of academic studies. Apart from demonstrating just how much these new ideas were circulating in the counterculture, these kinds of articles also show a genuine effort to bring these new understandings to the consciousness of readers. For example, a lecture given by the American literature

expert Eric Mottram to the Drury Lane Arts Lab was reproduced in full over three issues of *International Times* in the summer of 1969. Mottram's objective was it seems to create a practical theory of living with non-linear logic …

> quite simply an attempt to put together into a single field of mobile information sources which go to make up the possible model of our life within the cosmos on earth … We always need a model of the space–time in which one lives so that we can take our eyes off the rear-view mirror of the past and its Aristotelian linear logic and Newtonian magical, religious science. (Mottram 1969a: 4–5, also Mottram 1969b: 8–21)

Of course it is difficult to judge how the readership received Mottram's and other's arguments and perspectives, but it is certainly the case that the ideas that they were exploring were central to another countercultural practice, the multi-media lightshow. In this chapter then I want to develop themes related to the London counterculture's adoption of ideas around cosmic natures that have arisen in the last two chapters in relation to the underground press, but here I want to examine its presence in the less textual forms of representation practiced by the counterculture. In multi-media lightshows the counterculture enacted circulating ideas about cosmic natures and attempted to bring these new understandings to the consciousness of participants. Here then, I am less concerned with the deconstruction of texts and more focused on practice and performance.

Lightshow performances, their history and aesthetics are exceedingly difficult to trace. With the notable exception of a few pieces housed in the IOTA centre in Southern California, they tend not to be collected together and archived. They were by definition transitory, of the moment and all in the mix, so it is perhaps not surprising that this is the case. The most renowned lightshow artists and experimental underground cinematographers are however quite well represented in various accounts of the aesthetic especially those focused upon film makers. In reconstructing the multi-media lightshow scene in 1960s London therefore one is reliant upon secondary accounts of various performances, happenings and collectives in the underground press globally which give a good sense of the aesthetics, articles and features contained in the London underground press, as well as adverts that appeared in the city's papers such as this 1967 *International Times* advert for the 26 Kingly Street Environmental Cooperative:

> Mind-blowing total environment organisers. Can put on vast colossal light shows anywhere. All types of lighting equipment are available to them besides having a large stock of their own.

Figure 8.1   The cosmic cultural politics of light on the cover of *International Times* 22 (15 December 1967)

Source: © *IT* with thanks to www.international-times.org.uk.

The Form

From the mid 1960s to the mid-1970s multi-media lightshows became a dominant performative practice for the western counterculture. Lightshows involved the mixing of visual images (usually animated – improvised or recorded), with soundtracks (live or recorded) and other, more traditional lighting effects. As they evolved, in some venues lightshows merged with a genre of underground cinema labelled 'Expanded Cinema' and incorporated increasing amounts of recorded visual material, video tape becoming an increasingly affordable technology

through the later 1960s. They were often performed as part of a program of events, usually slotting in between acts at a festival or be-in, or as an integral part of musical performances at a gig. The aesthetic developed from low-tech late 1950s beginnings of swirling hot oils in a glass bowl sitting on an overhead projector, to later incorporating sequences of 8mm or 16mm film, and later still, samples from early video production.

There is a dearth of academic consideration of lightshows, and whilst music journalists occasionally discuss the art form, in general the aesthetic seems to have been dismissed. There are probably three reasons for this: Firstly, although there remains a subculture of psychedelic lightshow collectives in the UK and the US, lightshows are now fully 'established' and tend to be associated with pompous and overblown rock groups which rarely receive favourable critical attention. Likewise, their musical origins in esoteric and ephemeral psychedelic rock, also struggles for acceptance; Second, lightshows and their development are associated with youthful rebellion, albeit a spectacular one; Finally because they used for the most part, other than for larger headlining bands, such low-tech apparatus as overhead projectors, standard 35mm slide projectors, bowls of coloured oils, strobe lighting, acetates, ripple wheels, inks, gelatine and hallucinogens. For most multi-media operations, this was the limit of their technology. The innovation then was not high-tech, but rather in the ways in which light and sound were blended in the moment. Nevertheless today it is difficult to appreciate how revolutionary these audio-visual techniques were. Much of the innovation was the result of using technologies for something other that which they were intended. The late 1960s also saw the development of more high-tech electronic technologies that were useful to performance (and other) artists, some of which also found their way into the better resourced multi-media collectives. Computer animation for instance, whilst in its infancy was being used as were a range of new devices being developed to help edit and manipulate video recordings.

Lightshows then were multi-sensory orchestrations of light and sound. The rhythms of electrified music were complemented by the visual rhythms of electrified and manipulated light. For the larger and more ambitious performances it took up to 20 people and a large venue to mount a show. Walls, floors and ceilings became screens for a moving collage of syncopated figurative and abstract images segueing into one another The most successful practitioners were able to match the rhythm of images to the rhythm of the live or recorded soundtrack. Lightshows were complemented by mostly electronic sounds: New electronic groups played on stage in front of 'head-lights' – multi-coloured psychedelic light shows which were as much a part of the band's set as their music. Acid Rock was the new genre of rock music which probably owed as much to hallucinogens as multi-media aesthetics (although the two are intertwined). Psychedelic musicians would experiment with feedback on the guitar and their outpourings, some said, were intended to replay pure, primeval messages, natural sounds of the electronic age, emblematic of 'our life: electricity'. 'It is both fact and metaphor, conjuring up aural images of the current that drives our daily living' (Youngblood 1968b: 35).

Here then was the multi-media version of Marshall McLuhan's retribalizing effect through participation in and use of new electronic media. Regular *International Times* columnist Peter Stowell expressed a similar sentiment in April 1969: 'Out of the active lightshow, by which the over-efficient electric light is made charming, comes the same satisfaction which was once given by the charm of wild inefficient, natural fuel fires and lamps; a satisfaction borne out of wonder and the primeval worship of light' (Stowell 1969: 13).

Lightshows then were multi-media experiences but also constituted a different mode of representation, action-oriented representations intended to engage, temporarily at least, with the senses of the participant-viewer. Interestingly, when one reads accounts of lightshow and multi-media artists from the 1960s they frequently use the language of today's non-representational thought (see Thrift 2008 and Chapter 9). There are of course statements that one would expect to find associated with montage and collage aesthetics. These were the same as those from less than a decade earlier in reviews of Pop Art: that the placing of images and musical motifs into new contexts and creating moving collages of patterns, pictures and sound, provided the visual ground to reinterpret realities – to reinterpret and challenge what we see and experience. Similarly, the juxtaposition of figurative and non-figurative images with appropriate or inappropriate musical sounds made more profound political statements around for instance, the Vietnam war, because the absurdities and illogicalities could be better highlighted in a montage style. But in addition to these reviews were other statements about the non-verbal, non-linear montage aesthetic, of how multi-media lightshows tapped into some kind of collective consciousness: stories of how artists could 'feel' those in the room responding to their shows, how, to quote multi-media artist Stan VanDerBeek, artists could 'deal with logical understanding and penetration of the unconscious level to reach for the emotional denominator of all men [sic], the nonverbal basis of human life' (VanDerBeek 1966: 16). This way of understanding and interpreting multi-media lightshows was directly related to the counterculture's engagement with cosmic nature.

Multimedia in London

The aesthetic roots of lightshows are multiple and can be found in post-war innovations in non-figurative art, in philosophies of architecture and design, in beat performance, and in contemporaneous scientific discourse. Geographically, the West Coast of the United States is a point of origin for lightshows, and San Francisco can probably claim to be the birthplace of the multi-media lightshow, beginning in 1957 with artist Jordan Belson and composer Henry Jacobs' Vortex Concerts at the Morrison Planetarium in the city's Golden Gate Park. Lightshows developed then as very much part of the Beat era, and were characterised by the same kind of free form modern jazz improvisations favoured by the Beats. Indeed an even earlier San Francisco lightshow was devised by Elias Romero,

using liquid projectors and film to create an environment for Beat performance. Belson and Jacob's Vortex performances were effectively re-contextualising the kinds of mostly low-tech or zero-tech multi-media jazz-poetry events initiated by Beat poets. By the late 1960s, San Francisco alone had around 100 lightshow companies and collectives such as Anathema, Black Arts West, Crimson Madness and Head Lights. But San Francisco did not have a monopoly: as with most countercultural practices lightshows almost instantaneously spread across to the East Coast, especially New York, and to Europe, especially London.

In London there was also a short and recent post-war history of experimentation in the arts to build upon. The work of the Independent Group in the construction of their environments during the late 1950s and early 1960s were obviously influential (see Chapter 3), as was the work of other artists creating three-dimensional experiential collages such as Jeff Nuttall (Nuttall 1968). According to reports in London's underground press, although there had been experiments with slides for some time in the city, lightshows involving projections emerged around 1964 with probably the first cooperative, Keith Alburn and Partners, also known as the 26 Kingly Street Environmental Cooperative. The 26 Kingly Street Environmental Cooperative performed their first show in the spring of 1965 (Anon IT 1967). The following year at the London Free School, two members of Timothy Leary's Millbrook Institute, Joel and Toni Brown, brought with them some equipment that they had used in multi-media performances in New York and used it in a performance by Pink Floyd, a group who already had a reputation for enhancing their music with lighting effects. The Floyd would take their evolving lightshow to the Roundhouse for the *International Times* launch party (see Chapter 5). The *International Times* review of the Pink Floyd's set at the party shows how much music and light were co-dependent in this emergent art form of which the Pink Floyd were at the forefront: 'The Pink Floyd psychedelic pop group did weird things to the feel of the event with their scary feed-back sounds, slide projections playing on their skin – drops of paint run riot on the slides to produce outer space/ prehistoric textures on the skin – spotlights flashing on them in time with a drum beat' (*IT* Oct 1966: 14).

The Roundhouse continued to be an occasional venue for multi-media lightshows after the launch party and London had a few key figures who seemed to dominate the lightshow scene. Jack Braceland established Five Acre Products and took on the job of projecting Pink Floyd's lightshows as well as those of other psychedelic groups The Soft Machine and The Social Deviants. Mark Boyle, who with his team had developed methods for projecting various chemical reactions, was also a key figure and became for a while the a lightshow producer at the new club on Tottenham Court Road, UFO. UFO opened 23 December 1966 and featured Braceland's Five Acre Products, projecting for the Pink Floyd and The Soft Machine. Braceland went on to open his own club later in 1967, Happening 44 in Gerrard Street, and Boyle took over at the UFO sharing duties with other collectives such as The Overheads. Happening 44 featured The Social Deviants and Fairport Convention as the regular providers of sound but the club only lasted

a few months and closed in the autumn of 1967. Meanwhile lightshow collectives prospered across London and were much in demand for various events and benefits and whilst the major venues for shows were theatres such as the Stratford Royal, other clubs did open for a time and most gave over regular nights to lightshow performances.

This history and inheritance of lightshows is today claimed by digital artists and game designers as their own. It would be wrong however to assume that this was the first appropriation by capital. From the earliest stages, lightshows were commercial enterprises – they were after all very expensive to establish in terms of equipment – and many quickly became visual effects and lighting technicians for theatre and other media. In terms of the association between lightshow aesthetics and larger corporations, that is also long-lived and can be traced to their origins on the West Coast with organisations like Bell Labs involving themselves with the more prestigious multi-media artists like Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Robert Morris. The aesthetics of lightshows were, not unlike Op Art, so visually and aurally striking that it is hardly surprising that this quickly found a place in the more conventional outlets of mainstream media.

Cosmic Consciousness

> Sound is one experience of man which can put him in contact with cosmic activities which are beyond his ability to sense … he can listen on the fringes of the universe. (Christopher Hills quoted by Stansill 1967: 12)

> … if we agree that between primeval men gazing up at the constellations and audiences watching lightshows, there is only a philosophical difference; then by an examination of origins, developments and ideals we may come to appreciate lightshows as extraordinary vehicles running parallel to man's evolution. (Stowell 1969: 13)

Lightshows represent another enactment of the post-war cosmology that I have discussed throughout this book – an emergent understanding of nature and the universe that operated and was deployed in a range of practices, from modern planning to underground cinema. This post-Newtonian understanding of nature engendered a departure from existing ideas about matter and form and an increased emphasis on the elemental and primitive, complemented by the adoption of an Einsteinian understanding of the cosmos. The shift, brought about by advances in visual technologies showing new patterns and relationships in nature and the cosmos, as we have seen, had a profound effect on how the matter of nature was understood as well as the technologically mediated relationships between humans and nature. These new understandings found their way into the work of Op Artists, Pop Artists, cultural and media theorists, performers, filmmakers and the counterculture and the shared project concerned making the *invisible visible*

by capturing and projecting the fashionable and innovative conceptions of nature and bringing them to the senses of consumers. The multi-media lightshow was the latest manifestation of this effort.

The characteristic of many of these aesthetic tactics was *synaesthetic*: we were asked to remake our vision, to sense the invisible by touching it with *all* of our senses at once. And the multi-media lightshow was probably the most synaesthetic of them all. The shift in the representational register that occurred during the post war period was based upon the development of the new cosmology and its associated apprehension of nature which was developed in technoscientific discourse. During the 1960s as we have seen this new conception of a multi-dimensional, infinitely complex cosmic nature resulted in a range of countercultural practices that eschewed traditional forms of representation and attempted to develop more intuitive, embodied and multi-sensory modes of expression, such as in developments in underground cinema aesthetics, performance art, painting, experiments with the written word on the pages of underground publications like *Oz*, and the multi-media lightshow. The intention in these practices was not so much to represent this complexity but to create dynamic, interactive microcosmic models that were to me comsumed in a multi-sensory and embodied fashion. These then were participatory practices of representation intended to be experienced by the audience and to affect them, to create new subjectivities in co-relation to the microcosmic models.

As we have seen in the last two chapters, the counterculture had many often contradictory projects throughout the period. However, if one can trace some common ground between those projects it would be in the opposition of technocracy and the technocratic control of human bodies and minds. What emerged from this wider and amorphous project, especially from the ranks of the more popular and populist countercultural factions, was the fashioning of an alternative conception of the human subject and human subjectivity coincidentally (or not) quite similar to the conception developed in non-representational thought today (see Rycroft 2007). As discussed in Chapter 6, a range of thoughts and thinkers were often willingly appropriated by the counterculture to help develop this idea: Herbert Marcuse, Marshall McLuhan, Murray Bookchin, Paul Goodman, Theodore Roszak, Buckminster Fuller, R.D. Laing and many other contemporary thinkers from a range of disciplines and perspectives who had something to say to the counterculture about the relationships between nature, technology and humanity in particular, were adopted as patriarchs to the movement (Bookchin 1990, Buckminster Fuller 1969, Goodman 1971, Laing 1970, Marcuse 1991, McLuhan 1964, Roszak 1971). Similarly, underground publications reviewed and sponsored books, lectures, conferences and workshops that developed a range of anti-technocratic thoughts and practices. Whilst a newly envisaged countercultural subject circulated in a range of ideas and in a variety of forms, the work of R.D. Laing was particularly influential because of central importance to a range of countercultural practices was the idea of the inner self that he and others developed, particularly the rediscovery

and performance of that self in an effort to connect inner and outer worlds – this was in fact the basis of his therapeutic interventions (see Chapter 5).

A range of performative practices were developed by the counterculture to recover the 'true' self and shape new subjectivities. The activities with which the 1960s counterculture were synonymous: be-ins, happenings, various art and performance-based events, multi-media shows, were based upon this motivation. Many of the performative innovations were directed against linear representational practices and attempted to create microcosmic, multi-sensory versions of the macrocosmos. These microcosmic 'environments', it was felt, would invoke the discovery of the 'true self'. The message in these activities was that the self was fundamentally and inescapably networked, not only to other subjects in the world, but to the objects of nature and technology within and beyond the world. Whilst global and especially focused on the West Coast US cities and in New York on the East Coast, in Europe, London was the main site for adoption and development of these new activities because there was as we have seen, a recent history of these practices already in the city from which to draw inspiration.

Certain technologies were appropriated by the counterculture to recover this multi-dimensional and holistic cosmic nature of interdependent and co-related objects and subjects. Amongst these technologies various hallucinogens are perhaps the most spectacular examples. In covering developments in psychedelic technologies, the underground press stressed the vital networks of minds and bodies that they facilitated:

> … the hippy-rock-psychedelic roadshow was at least as significant as was the gradual development of electromagnetic wave theory. In the case of psychedelics, it's clear that the means of access will not be another generator or dynamo or reactor, but that access will take place in the human mind. Millions of minds whirring, buzzing, flashing, coming to different kinds of decisions. Millions of minds responding more intensely (Stafford 1968: 3).

Psychedelic hallucinogens were also used as the basis of a series of communitarian experiments established to explore these emerging subjectivities arising from the technology. Psychedelic communes of which London seems to have had a few, although they were more of a West Coast phenomenon, were established as centres that nurtured 'pure humans' who, upon leaving the commune would affect the wider world with the new consciousness they had gained. Leary's co-worker Richard Alpert saw this as part of the next stage of the co-evolution of humanity and technology: 'Like I see kids dropping out, returning and then picking and choosing knowledge, being fascinated by parts of physics, parts of medicine, parts of mechanics. Putting them together and coming up with entire new machines, new techniques, new ideas' (Bryan 1967: 9).

There is however a tendency to pharmacological determinism in explanations of the dynamics of post-war cultures of resistance in general with for instance the Mod movement's use of amphetamines cited as vital to sustaining this weekend

essentially subculture (see Hebdige 1979). Hallucinogens and especially LSD play a similar role in explanations of the counterculture and are credited with giving the movement the kinds of otherworldly or out-of-this-world cosmic consciousness that is the subject of much of this book. However, given this, it is surprising how infrequently hallucinogens appear in the underground press. Far from being the driving force of the late 1960s counterculture in London, hallucinogens were a minor aspect that was certainly secondary to the use of other less pharmacological and more electronic technologies. Hallucinogens aside then, electronic technologies especially were deployed in an attempt to create 'environments' in which a collective revelation could be facilitated. Those environments, like the multi-media happening and psychedelic lightshow created synaesthetic experiential models of the macrocosmos. In them, the 'true' self would be revealed in co-relation to the objects and subjects of nature and cosmos. Advances in communications technology in particular excited countercultural practitioners:

> There has been a gradual and ongoing acceleration of human evolution in each of its aspects: it is not coincidental that man's first conquest of the inner space of the atom has occurred concurrently with his first steps into the outer space of the universe, nor that along with the expansion of the means of communication come the expansion of consciousness and a change in the nature of what is being communicated. (Hartweg 1965: 3).

Using Marshall McLuhan's ideas, countercultural groups exploited new electronic media because they believed that they had the potential to affect an evolutionary shift: he suggested that electronic technology, particularly electronic media, set in train a new phase in the evolutionary process whereby a segmenting socio-cultural system brought on by mechanical technologies would be replaced by an integrative one. McLuhan's global village was an integrated, co-dependent community in which participation and interaction were maximised and where preliterate oral forms of community organisation would predominate. This would result directly from the spread and use of electronic media because 'electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalisation whatever' (McLuhan 1964: 80, see also McLuhan 1970, McLuhan and Fiore 1997). The theoretical developments that excited certain factions of the counterculture, like those of McLuhan or Buckminster Fuller, seemed to be suggesting that these new technologies were actually affecting human evolution, that new subjects were emerging from the emergence of a co-relation between technology and humanity. Technology, in this comprehension, was part of the evolutionary process as both mechanism and outcome. Indeed, for McLuhan, synaesthesia was a 'cultural ideal', a 'state of nature from whose bosom alphabetic literacy tore us, and a possible future state to which electronic media might be capable of returning us' (Morrison 2000: 39). It is in the deployment of these concepts in countercultural activities that post-war

shift in the practices of representation can be identified, a shift which lightshow aesthetics fully exploited.

Video and Synaesthetic Cinema

In the later 1960s as the technology and know-how surrounding lightshows became more widespread, underground papers began advertising and reviewing developments in new equipment, especially video. Through these syndicated articles readers were encouraged to establish media collectives with the aim of undermine the dominance of straight media, to 'seize the media and save the world' (Menkin 1971: 46). Global Village, a New York based video cooperative with hopes of instigating an underground television network, explicitly used McLuhan's theories in an attempt to undermine the power of the mass media. Global Village was part of a wider underground media project after McLuhan which attempted to break-down established practices of TV viewing by presenting their productions on video 'simultaneously on a multiple-image, multiple channel basis with the fragments being rearranged and reorganised in the viewers head' (Reilly 1970: 15). Their video productions were designed as far as possible to present information on a non-linear basis and on multiple channels. In this way, the 'viewer gathers material from the various channels and reorganizes it into a meaningful statement' (Reilly 1970: 15). San Francisco too had video collectives in the Bay Area working on the similar principles and activating McLuhan's ideas, the largest being Video Free America whose project, like Global Village, was set up as the vanguard of an underground primary communications network (Werner 1971: 6).

In London the network of video collectives and producers was less extensive but they certainly impacted upon the lightshow scene and multi-media aesthetics in the city. The lightshow in London evolved from the multiple projection of images through liquid light projections to the incorporation of film and video clips. It was in the latter development and in particular the incorporation of underground cinema into multi-media shows that the aesthetic practice reached its peak. Like many post war aesthetic practices including the lightshow itself, underground cinema attempted to develop a synaesthetic model of humanity and cosmic nature. This arose in both the production and especially consumption of the aesthetic. In terms of production McLuhan's notion of technologies as extensions of human bodies and minds was exploited: 'Our cameras have become personal, like extensions of our fingers and our eyes and they move to the beat of our hearts' (Mekas 1966: 8). In terms of consumption, underground cinema intended to create a total environment through which the viewer-participant could experience cosmic nature. These phenomenological representations were designed to stimulate the mind through an engagement with the body in a multi-sensory experience.

The use of new electronic media by underground media experts were occasionally justified by their perceived potential in the creation of Antonin Artaud's

communicative delirium. Artaud was an exponent of destabilizing perceptions of reality through theatrical performance and the shattering of language. His *Theatre of Cruelty* (1932) argued that the theatre reached the audience at a deeper level of understanding by 'appealing beyond reason, directly to the senses' (Hewison 1986: 89) not unlike the justifications given for multi-media lightshows. In a feature on the 'New Cinema' of the underground in *Oz*, Albie Thoms argued that the effect of freezing frames, repeating sequences of frames, elongating movements in time and playing on retinal superimpositions was to force the attention from action to the whole film texture. By organising the rhythm patterns of frames in their films, film makers, like mantras, were setting up 'a brain rhythm which leads to expanded consciousness' (Thoms 1970: 32). As one would expect, because it was reputed to aid the development of a single consciousness, the electronic medium and reports featuring its innovations frequently appeared in *Oz* magazine. Indeed, news of the medium in all its guises and the effort to manipulate it to the underground's advantage was central to the content of *Oz* since stylistically, it relied heavily on the fashionability of these developments.

Gene Youngblood was the media correspondent for the *Los Angeles Free Press* and appeared in the London underground press through syndication. Youngblood was the first academic to study multi-media practices and performances and the first to intellectualise the field. In the late 1960s he referred to underground cinema as 'Expanded Cinema' because it both better reflected the project of expanding consciousness amongst filmmakers and suggested that the aesthetic itself was part of a movement towards expanding the network of objects and subjects that constituted consciousness: 'the intermedia network of cinema and television ... now functions as nothing less than the nervous system of mankind' (Youngblood 1970c: 41). Here then were McLuhan's ideas made concrete in cinematic practice where electronic media could form a global embrace and make global connections at the level of consciousness. Expanded cinema later became the title of Youngblood's first book on Underground cinema. The book consisted in part of redrafts of Youngblood's *Free Press* articles and remains one of very few texts on the subject. Expanded cinema had, Youngblood felt, begun to make real progress in tapping in to the cosmic consciousness, especially in the genre he labelled synaesthetic cinema. Synaesthetic cinema was the 'only aesthetic language suited to the post-industrial, post-literate, man-made environment with its multidimensional simulsensory network of information sources … the only aesthetic tool that even approaches the reality continuum of conscious existence in the nonuniform, nonlinear, nonconnected electronic atmosphere of the Paleocybernetic Age' (Youngblood 1970c: 77).

Synaesthetic cinema was not composed of common motifs, themes or styles, and in general, abandoned traditional cinematic narrative because 'events in reality do not move in a linear fashion'. Similarly, it abandoned 'common notions of style because there is no style in nature'. There was 'only one rule: that form, structure and content should not be separate. This is the one concepts which applies both to art and life, the deciding factor between balance and imbalance. A perfect

dialogue is to be found in nature: the way water (content) determines to course of a river (form) by soil erosion (structure) while consistently seeking to level itself' (Youngblood 1968a: 18). Synaesthetic films consisted of a range of images and distortion-interference effects projected onto the screen, edited together as a continuous movie giving the impression of objects metamorphosing into other objects. The production of synaesthetic movies was driven, Youngblood felt, more by instinct than design, because they were in effect extensions of the filmmaker's central nervous system. Accordingly, through synaesthetic cinema 'man attempts to express a total phenomenon – his own consciousness' (Youngblood 1970c: 76, see Razutis 1993). Synaesthetic movies were an attempt to model cosmic order and bring it to the senses of viewers, to expand and awaken a cosmic consciousness by creating a new kind of vision. Youngblood likened this expanded consciousness to Freud's notion of oceanic consciousness, in which 'our individual existence is lost in mystic union with the universe'. Indeed, nothing 'could be more appropriate to contemporary experience, when for the first time man has left the boundaries of this globe' (Youngblood 1970c: 92). This consciousness was not filtered by experience or received representations but was constituted by the same prediscursive moment one achieves through staring in 'mindless wonder' at nature, or through mantra. As such, the ideal outcome of viewing a synaesthetic show was a kind of gestalt insight 'seeing things together which previously were unconnected' (Youngblood 1968a: 18).

Whilst the image content of synaesthetic cinema was varied there were common themes. Lightshows, into which synaesthetic screenings were often slotted and to which they were closely related aesthetically, had for a few years been using images relating to the cosmos and the emergent post-war cosmology. I have in my own slide collection a box of 50 slides that were used in the early 1970s by a small lightshow collective in London. These would have been projected through synchronised 35mm projectors on multiple surfaces and mixed with other lighting effects from liquid slides and/or overhead projectors projecting through coloured oils. The images on half of the slides are renaissance iconography and on the other half are high quality reproductions of recent astronomical observations of our solar system and the night sky generally. These types of images were apparently common. The Crab Nebula Lightshow for instance took their name and some of their projections from the 1968 discovery of the Crab Nebular by astronomers at Cambridge. The images used in synaesthetic cinema were similarly macroscopic as well as juxtaposing microscopic images of similar form-patterns. Jordan Belson, the person credited as the founder of the lightshow in 1950s San Francisco became synaesthetic movie maker in the 1960s. Belson also merged and juxtaposed newly visualised microscopic and macroscopic moving images and worked in the 'paradoxical realm in which subatomic phenomena and the cosmologically vast are identical' (Youngblood 1970c: 175). Gene Youngblood's descriptions of Belson's movies in *Expanded Cinema* help underline this fascination with the cosmic and technoscientific and the implications for consciousness and humanity: On *Phenomena* (1965), 'As though you were approaching earth as a god from

cosmic consciousness' (Youngblood 1970c: 433). 'The film [manages] to transport whoever is looking at it out of the boundaries of the self' (Youngblood 1970b: 164); on *Allures* (1961), 'A combination of molecular structures and astronomical events mixed with subconscious phenomena ... a trip backward along the senses from matter to spirit' (Youngblood 1970c: 160).

Representation and Vision

Like much cultural production in the immediate postwar period, synaesthetic cinema worked with and manipulated the moment of perception by using aesthetic strategies that drew upon and reflect a broader shift in the practices of representation (Rycroft 2005, Riley 1999). This arose in part because the subjects that had begun to excite artists and performers were drawn from recent advances in technoscience, subjects which were not necessarily visible phenomena so much as theoretical constructs and models. For synaesthetic cinema this concerned bringing invisible energies and forces to the senses of the viewer: 'It's not what we're seeing so much as the process and effect of seeing: that is, the phenomenon of experience itself, which exists only in the viewer' (Youngblood 1970c: 97). Whilst impossible to 'represent' those forces it was possible to 'evoke them in the inarticulate conscious of the viewer'. Like its close relation kinaesthetic cinema – which used more formal shapes and patterns to evoke similar forces – synaesthetic cinema 'makes us aware of fundamental realities beneath the surface of normal perception: forces and energies'. But the reception, bringing to the consciousness and 'articulation' of the viewing experience happened, Youngblood thought, on a 'nonverbal' level (Youngblood 1970c: 97).

These performances were then both enacting and intending to impart a vision or idea of cosmic nature through a practice of representation that was not static or enframing, but multi-sensory, multi-dimensional and embodied. To be a participant or member of the audience at a multi-media lightshow was intended to be a transformative experience in which one would be made aware of the connections between matter and energy, body and mind, and cosmologically vast and well and the sub atomically small. That awareness came about not just through the sense of sight but from the all-encompassing, visual, aural and haptic experience. Whether these were successful of course is another matter but what multi-media lightshow encapsulated is much of what this account of has been based, the articulation of a vision in an innovative mode of representation that establishes the style of 1960s. And it is around these issues of 1960s London, vision and representation that I want to conclude in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Conclusions: Post-War Vision
and Representation

> I once thought it was necessary to have a theory, and that my problem was that I
> didn't. But nowadays all you needed was information (Eco, 1989, p.223).

Throughout the book I have tried to conclude, summarise and connect, rendering
an extensive concluding chapter somewhat redundant. There are however three
elements that I would like to draw out in this short final chapter: the first concerns
1960s London itself and what the book has demonstrated about the city not so
much as a physical space but as a cultural image and imagination; the second is
a plea for geographers and cultural studies scholars to continue to take ideas and
visions seriously however immaterial or indeed whacky they might seem; finally,
and related to the importance of ideas and visions, I want to emphasise what has
been discussed throughout the book about the changing processes and practice of
representation in the twentieth century.

1960s London

Whilst it was been implicit throughout this account of 1960s London, there is a
clear sense in which London was culturally 're-capitalised' from the late 1950s
onwards. This occurred in tandem with a phase of cultural globalisation that by the
turn of the 1960s looked across the Atlantic for dialogue and inspiration more than
it did to the British provinces. This was not at all a processes exclusive to high or
establishment culture and in fact is perhaps even more marked in popular culture.
It was also a process that was replicated by the counterculture in London. The
underground press very rarely covered undergrounds of provincial cities and when
they did tended to be thoroughly off hand and patronising. Most of Britain's major
underground publications were produced and consumed in London and London
– and particularly Notting Hill Gate – were placed at the informative heart of all
countercultural innovations and used as a yardstick with which to beat the slacking
provinces.

   Oz 44 (September, 1972) carried a feature about the Notting Hill countercultural
community written by Dick Pountain, a member of London's (excluded)
Situationist group, King Mob. Pountain was first attracted to the area in 1967
by cheap marijuana, cheap accommodation and jazz music (Dick Pountain in
Green 1988: 217). More importantly, because a sizable proportion of the local
population were recently arrived immigrants from the West Indies, there was an

Figure 9.1   The *International Times*/Lovebooks 1968 map of Notting Hill
Source: © *IT* with thanks to www.international-times.org.uk.

'absence of any strong local community who might have resented invaders', a sort of 'social vacuum ... most people were just passing through with no ties, none of the obligations of a community', particularly a suburban one (Pountain 1972: 17). By 1972, the success of Notting Hill's bohemian community and their experiment in a 'new way of leisure' – a sort of '5 till 9 dropping-out' – like Greenwich Village, New York, and Venice Beach, Los Angeles, had attracted young, liberal, middle-class 'executives' into the area, increasing rents and house prices. But at the height of their popularity in the 1960s London's enclaves of countercultural living, Notting Hill Gate, Ladbroke Grove, and to a certain extent Chalk Farm and Kentish Town, dictated the pattern of the London and national underground scene: 'Whilst there was a ... provincial wing and a ... rural wing, the English counterculture was in essence London based' (Nelson 1989: 51).

For Nelson (1989), this absence of 'concrete bonds' between the London papers and the rest of 'England' was 'probably one of the more debilitating features of the English counterculture' (Nelson 1989: 51). In a 1972 survey of the British underground press, *Frendz* identified and mapped 114 publications in total, 72 of which were produced outside London, but most in the South East. Papers in Britain's provincial cities were occasionally derivative, aping their 'national' competition and drew on a pool of articles in the UPS, but most covered

local concerns and local politics. Many of these publications were radical and 'if anything, the separation from London intensified the radicalism at the expense of hedonism' (Fountain 1988: 178). These were not then aping the cultural politics of the capital's counterculture and from London, this tended to promote some condescending coverage of other scenes in Britain. A trip to Scunthorpe covered in *Oz* 25 for instance is presented as a ten year leap back in time to the 1950s, a landscape peopled by Teddy-boys, greasy cafes and dreary pubs. Only meeting one local 'head', they concluded that the underground had not really reached this far out of London although their paraphernalia was freely available (Hughes 1969).

The counterculture's disenfranchisement of the provinces generally was of course a rejection of their origins and this was also picked up by David Widgery who saw in the provinces some important influences on the early development of the underground. Writing very early in the run of the magazine, in *Oz* 2 (March 1967), he nostalgically and ironically bemoaned this ignorance: 'London's a big hoax luv ... Once upon a time there was a Swinging Britain ... The time when London was really zinging was when the Bulge Babies were in school reading "Tit Bits" in the back of the class with NHS specs in sellotape'. Using the opportunity to attack one of his most hated media fabrications, Swinging London, Widgery continues: '*Time* and *Life*'s London bureau didn't notice us then, in the high street billiards saloons with our duck's arse haircut and Warner Brothers hip talk'. This was the authentic 'real in the abrasive world where people travel in second class trains to Slough and put cash in the Coop Xmas Box and buy Bachelors records and don't even know about the Psychedelic Revolution' (Widgery 1967b: 19).

Whilst underground or countercultural London tended to replicate the cultural geography of London as both appropriator and dominator of the provinces that was established when London began to swing then, the account of the city in this book has also demonstrated that there are other more profound connections between the two Londons of the 1960s. These connections surround the enactment and deployment of a modern cosmology that has appeared throughout this book in various forms and as such does not need a great deal of summarising here. New understandings and theories of matter, nature, energy and the universe underpinned the aesthetics strategies and cultural politics of those who set the style for swinging London and those who established underground publications and multi-media lightshows later in the 1960s.

Of course, as I set out in the introduction, the popular imagination of 1960s London conflates Swinging and underground London and, like the title of this book, both versions are labelled 'swinging'. The popular version of 1960s London is perhaps best represented in the Austin Powers movies where psychedelia and hallucinogens mix seamlessly with miniskirts and E-Type Jaguars. Hopefully, what I have shown though by holding the two apart and exploring each in detail is that the connections are less obvious than the spectacular mediated version of 1960s London suggests. The shared vision of modern cosmology on the one hand casts a more earnest light on the frivolous and lightweight swinging scene, and on the other hand, grounds some of the more mystical, hippy excesses of the

counterculture in some hard-edged technoscience. So, the two versions of 1960s London are connected, but not in the way they are more commonly conflated.

Vision

The broader implication of this account of 1960s London is that we should continue to consider the importance of vision, apparently immaterial things that have significant material effects. This is by no means a call to privilege the sense of sight above other modes of engagement with the world, but concerns vision in its broadest sense, that is, not simply visuality, sense of sight, and scopic regimes but, more significantly, vision as idea, of the ways in which powerful and not so powerful visions are set to work in making and remaking the world. And if any place was about imagination and powerful ideas then it was London in the 1960s, a city whose physical space changed remarkably little during the decade, but the imagination and image of which transformed twice over if not more so during the same time. We should then balance recent moves in geography and the social sciences that focus more on the phenomenological and the experiential with a continued consideration of ideas and visions. Related developments in cultural geography that focus upon action and practice should also be balanced by a focus upon vision and thought. 1960s London was, as I have suggested, replete with idea and imagination and was lived in by its youthful inhabitants in both body and mind, and, as Denis Cosgrove recently reminded us, dwelling or 'inhabiting a space is as much imaginative and conceptual as it is visceral and sensual' (Cosgrove 2008: 47).

The vision that I have traced and that has found both material and immaterial expression and form is one from the classical foundations of geography and close to the heart of the discipline, cosmography. Alexander von Humboldt's aim in writing the two volumes of *Cosmos* between 1845 and 1862 was to depict in a single work the entire material universe, from the nebulae of the stars to mosses and rocks in a 'vivid style that will elicit feeling'. Humboldt, like mid-twentieth-century artists and the cultural politics and practices of the counterculture, was attempting to bring to the senses of his audience a holistic understanding of the order of the heavens and the order of the world. The cosmos was for Humboldt 'the assemblage of all things in heaven and earth, the universality of created things constituting the perceptible world' (von Humboldt 1997: 71). For the mid-twentieth century the understanding of the physical laws that controlled the raw material and energy of the universe were fundamentally different from those of the nineteenth century in which von Humboldt wrote. We had moved from Euclidian to non-Euclidian geometry, from a mechanical, clockwork universe in which time and space were constant everywhere to a dynamic and contingent one where time and space were relative and matter and energy were interchangeable. The understanding of nature, its processes and its connection to humanity too were fundamentally different in the mid-nineteenth century. There is a broader project indicated here that would

explore the effect of this new cosmography on other forms of twentieth-century knowledge and understating such as for instance the discipline of geography itself which one could argue remains entrenched in Newtonian cosmology, but for the remainder of this conclusion I will confine myself to the implications of what I have covered in the book for another pillar of modern geography, representation.

Representation

The representation of this mid twentieth-century vision of cosmic nature has been a key theme of this book. However, what has been traced in exploring these representations is a shift in the register of representation. For me, the experiments of the 1960s in for instance underground publications, in happenings and in the multi-media lightshow were not heralding a crisis of representation in which authorial authority, objectivity and socio-cultural circumstances undermine any representational practice or project. Rather, the mode of representation changed. Representations became multi-sensory and multi-dimensional, democratised and embodied, processual and model-like, and in these developments reflective of a more nuanced understanding of nature and humanity as a result of advances in the theoretical and physical sciences.

It is probably clear that I struggle to accept non-representational thought, apart from anything else because we have not exhausted the uses of representation – or its limits – or indeed geographical modes of representation and enquiry. However, I would certainly not wish to abandon some of the important recastings of performance, action and embodiment that non-representational thought engenders. In the introduction I noted that at least in terms of intent, non-representational approaches do not fundamentally contradict those of established 'new' cultural geography and that one can see them as a progression in the sense that they are focused upon what lies beyond the limits of representation. In fact the recognition of those limits has always been fundamental to 'new' cultural geography. Non-representational thinking claims to abandon causal explanation and to turn away from the idealisation of meaning, because they tend to render dull and lifeless their objects and subjects of study, and to offer a process-oriented perspective in which the world is actively brought into being and presented by agents in relation to one another in any given situation. Rather than representations, performance and performativity have become the focus because they are felt to better account for the unfolding creation of happenings in everyday life as we encounter, relate to and negotiate with other agents in the world. Furthermore 'representations' in this conception are in themselves actions or performances, 'transformers' that do not so much picture the world as take their place along side a series of other performative practices that conjure the world into being again and again.

In their apprehension of the world and in their project to reconsider and recast the human subject as networked, non-representational approaches can trace their heritage to countercultural experiments (see Rycroft 2007). The ways the therapeutic

spaces arising through 'New Age' dance practices have been recently portrayed for instance, are similar to claims made for the multi-media 'environments' of the 1960s (McCormack 2005). And the concepts of new subjectivities emerging from non-representational thinking today, in both the conception of a vital network of objects and subjects, and in an appreciation of technological objects as extensions of human subjects, where the distinctions between the software and hardware of social lives are blurred, develop further those favoured by the counterculture. The new non-representational human subject is the product of the enhanced capacities afforded by technology to the point that the boundary between the self and object world become redundant and the human self is redefined. Consciousness itself is also extended into the environment as a result of expanded communicative and memorising capacities of human and non-human subjects. Different and as yet unformulated modes of expression are called for to bring this newly conceived world to the senses to *apprehend* rather than *represent* the world, modes that employ the full range of the senses and evoke the kinaesthetic character of being in a world that is always becoming.

As we have seen, the 1960s counterculture developed practices and performances that were representational and simultaneously non-representational. In the pages of London's underground press and in the performative practices of the multi-media lightshow, the counterculture built upon post-war aesthetic developments in the visual and the performing arts such as the abstraction of Op painting or the Beat Generation's fusion of poetry and jazz. This shift was characterized by the desire of artists and performers working in a range of genres to evoke the full range of the senses in the consumers and performers of their work, to privilege more ways of knowing than the cognitive, aural, oral and visual. Although apparently non-representational, lightshows and multi-media environments were also representational practices whose referent was a vision of newly conceived cosmic nature. We have seen too that many in the counterculture were fascinated by developments in technoscience, developments that were beginning to reveal not only a quantum understanding of the cosmos but also the role that new technological objects could play in connecting humanity to this realisation.

Representation and its practices underwent a change in the post-war period. I am arguing that this was the result of integrating new cosmologies. Even if that were not the case however, it is clear that in the post-war period various representational practices attempted to evoke a range of sensory, experiential and subconscious responses in their consumers and performers. Rather than non-representational, these practices of representation are perhaps better described as meta-representational because of their transformative intent. That intent underpinned a new form of politicking during the 1960s, one with an emphasis on evocation and creativity rather than conventional and exclusive forms of political representation. And in 1960s London it was the popular underground that was most vociferous in its articulation of this stance. The final words then should be theirs:

Out of the active lightshow, by which the over-efficient electric light is made charming, comes the same satisfaction which was once given by the charm of wild inefficient, natural fuel fires and lamps; a satisfaction borne out of wonder and the primeval worship of light. Light is the originator of motion, and by transference, of emotion also. Motion begets the sonic medium (sound); and so logic interprets light and sound to be manifestations of emotion. The integrated lightshow and music group must therefore result in solution. This attempt at integration is being frustrated by political thought and action, the concept of which was, ironically, generated out of fear of the truth - which is fear of the light. (Stowell 1969: 13)

Happenings are occurring in England, in France, in America, in Japan, they are precisely speaking: a real event taking place. There is no stage, it happens in a room, in the middle of the room or in the street or by the sea, between the spectators and the people we no longer call actors but agents, there is but an ephemeral difference. A difference in time. The agents actually do things (never mind what) they provoke events and make something – anything – really happen. (Henry 1967: 9)

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