

David Watt

'The Maker and the Tool': Charles Parker, Documentary Performance, and the Search for a Popular Culture

Charles Parker's BBC Radio Ballads of the late 1950s and early 1960s, acknowledged by Derek Paget in NTQ 12 (November 1987) as a formative influence on the emergence of what he called 'Verbatim Theatre', have been given a new lease of life following their recent release by Topic Records; but his theatrical experiments in multi-media documentary, which he envisaged as a model for 'engendering direct creativity in the common people', remain largely unknown. The most ambitious of these – *The Maker and the Tool*, staged as part of the Centre 42 festivals of 1961–62 – is exemplary of the impulse to recreate a popular culture which preoccupied many of those involved in the Centre 42 venture. David Watt, who teaches Drama at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, began researching these experiments with work on a case study of Banner Theatre of Actuality, the company Parker co-founded in 1973, for *Workers' Playtime: Theatre and the Labour Movement since 1970*, co-authored with Alan Filewod. This led to further research in the Charles Parker Archive at Birmingham Central Library, and the author is grateful to the Charles Parker Archive Trust and the staff of the Birmingham City Archives (particularly Fiona Tait) for the opportunity to explore its holdings and draw on them for this article.

IN JANUARY 1963 an amateur theatre group in Birmingham, the Leaveners, held its first annual general meeting and moved acceptance of the following statement of aims:

- To prepare dramatic and other works with the express purpose of rediscovering and asserting the popular tradition.
- To encourage and develop creative cultural activity among the widest sections of the people and especially among the industrial community of the Midlands.
- To develop experimental forms of theatre and, in particular, to explore the use of the new technical media.
- To bring together existing forms of cultural activity in shared works.
- In general, to accept the responsibility, implicit in their title, of giving expression to the creative potential of the common people, as the only true basis of art, as of society.¹

This ambitious programme of cultural reform was inspired by the Leaveners' appearance as part of the Centre 42 festivals of 1962 in

The Maker and the Tool, a 'Theatre Folk Ballad' written/compiled and directed by Charles Parker and staged in a range of non-theatre spaces in six different versions, one for each of the festival towns.

The Leaveners are long gone, and *The Maker and the Tool*, which exemplified many of the basic principles of the Centre 42 movement, now exists only as a collection of working notes and heavily annotated and incomplete draft scripts in the Charles Parker Archive of the Birmingham Central Reference Library and as a footnote within the footnote which Centre 42 has become. But as a pioneering experiment in the development of multi-media documentary theatre techniques and community-based performance making, its influence is everywhere; and, as Derek Paget pointed out in NTQ some fifteen years ago, 'work such as Charles Parker's . . . is now often being received by younger practitioners through the *tradition* it established'² rather than from any direct knowledge of it.

Reinspection reveals a richer, more dense and 'poetic' version of documentary theatre than that which the tradition Paget was concerned to trace has left us, and one which is characterized by an embrace of new technologies as tools for ordinary people to make 'art' which renders it worthy of attention in a 'mediatized' age.

The Context for Centre 42

Centre 42 was the only direct outcome of Resolution 42 passed by the British Trade Union Congress in 1960, intended to push the trade union movement into serious engagement with the arts and popular culture. It has been virtually forgotten by all but those who were there at the time, and dismissed by most, who refer to it, if at all, as a brave if misguided failure.³ On the surface, it generated six week-long festivals hosted by Trades Councils in Wellingborough, Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham, Bristol, and Hayes (Middlesex) in 1962, an unsuccessful campaign to raise money to adapt the Round House in London as a performance space, a queue of creditors who were not paid off until well into the 1970s, and little else beyond a remarkably persistent acrimony between some of those involved.

Given the ambitions held for it by its initiators, failure is little surprise. This was a venture committed to a lot more than just popularizing the arts among unionists. For Clive Barker, perhaps as important in the venture as Arnold Wesker (whose name has become synonymous with it), the task was to 'recreate a popular culture in this country . . . [thus] helping to forge a new community with a national identity and character'.⁴ In a report to the Management Committee of Centre 42 in 1961, from which this remark is drawn, he laid out a set of 'agreed principal aims and intentions' which imply a programme of artistic and social reform amounting to little less than a cultural and social revolution:

We are a group of artists who share certain socialist values. These values imply for us the necessity of shifting all emphasis from the monetary and competitive values of life, which

tend to isolate man from man, to those values which reaffirm the sense of community, and thereby the sense of responsibility that all men should have for each other.

A gap exists between the artist and the community. Art has lost its rightful place in the community. By this we mean that whereas it should be the natural heritage of the community it has become the preserve of a minority – making it something apart from life.

We also deplore the trend in our society towards the isolation of the individual and the break up of community life and with this break up the death of the community spirit.

To use the words of Raymond Williams, we are looking for whatever forms are possible in which artists [can] have control of their own means of expression, in such ways that they will have relation to a community rather than to a market or a patron.

We believe that we must strive to bridge the gap between the artists and the public and to break down all barriers, social, economic, and psychological, that stand between the people of this country and full participation in the arts (p. 1).

These were 'basic principles' and 'if you don't agree with them then there is no place for you in Centre 42. Take it or leave it' (p. 2).

This was a response to a widely shared sense of cultural crisis, indicated for Barker in the fact that 'we have lost our popular culture somewhere along the road' in face of an

American-derived but anonymously cosmopolitan popular culture . . . with its mid-Atlantic accents, pseudo-serious and pretentious concern for society, its debasement of classical and folk art in the name of entertainment, its patronizingly coy attitudes and complete lack of any ethical, moral, or responsible standards whatsoever (p. 2).

For Wesker the task was crucial:

If we do not succeed . . . then a vast army of highly-powered commercial enterprises are going to sweep into the leisure hours of future generations and create a cultural mediocrity the result of which can only be a nation emotionally and intellectually immature, capable of enjoying nothing, creating nothing, and effecting nothing.⁵

Following Richard Hoggart's dire predictions (in his recently published and highly influential *The Uses of Literacy*) of the death of working-class community in the face of the importation from the USA of the milk bar, the jukebox, and popular music, many other

people were similarly concerned about the erosion of popular culture by outside forces.

Wesker, in a stance reminiscent of Second International bourgeois intellectuals of the early years of the century, saw the task as an attempt to humanize a working class brutalized by capitalism through educating its members in the beauties of a 'high art' tradition (or selected bits of it) to which they had been denied access since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution:

You start off with a picture: orchestras tucked away in valleys, people stopping Auden in the street to thank him for their favourite poem, teenagers around the jukebox arguing about my latest play, miners flocking to their own opera house; a picture of a nation thirsting for all the riches their artists can excite them with, hungry for the greatest, the best, unable to wait for Benjamin Britten's next opera, arguing about Joan Littlewood's latest.⁶

Barker, who saw the high arts as by then 'largely in pawn to commercial interests', and thus took a more populist stance, was convinced of the importance of a vanguardist role:

The people are inarticulate – we as professional artists must be ready and willing to help them to find their new ways of expression. If we can start this movement going in the community and can foster it and help it develop, then, and only then, do we stand a chance of success.

Central to this was his assumption that 'if we are starting a revolution it must be started as near to base as possible'.⁷ Others (most famously John McGrath)⁸ were later concerned to elaborate this position into a post-Gramscian notion of 'cultural hegemony', and into a strategy for the reassertion of a working-class counter-culture, but this was strictly a 1970s spin-off from the debates generated by the venture rather than part of it. For McGrath, these debates took shape in a protracted and vitriolic correspondence (mostly private but occasionally bursting into the public realm) between him and Wesker, provoked by his savage review of Wesker's *The Friends* in 1970, and detailed in Catherine Itzin's *Stages in the Revolution* a decade later.⁹

Before these debates could be had, much less resolved, positive responses by a few Trades Councils to some vague proposals to organize a format for union festivals forced Centre 42's hand on how it should proceed. Consequently the six festivals went ahead in the autumn of 1962, following a try-out in Wellingborough in 1961.

The Centre 42 Festivals

The festivals comprised art exhibitions (some by local artists and children), a folk concert built around central figures in the Second British Folk Song Revival (of which more later), a night of poetry and jazz, a jazz dance, poetry readings and performances by folk singers in workplaces and pubs, and some theatrical performances. These latter included a production of Bernard Kops's *Enter Solly Gold*, the National Youth Theatre's *Hamlet*, a double bill of Ramuz's *The Soldier's Tale* (with music by Stravinsky), and Wesker's *The Nottingham Captain* (hastily cobbled together for the purpose and performed twice nightly, once to a jazz and then to a classical music score), and another double bill performed by the Leavers – *The Lonesome Train* (an American radio piece from the 1940s described by Charles Parker, who adapted and directed it for the stage, as 'an American folk cantata on Abraham Lincoln')¹⁰ – and *The Maker and the Tool*.

The festivals neither discovered a ready-made working-class audience nor created one, particularly for the theatre work; the best attended events were the folk concerts ('always the most representative and the widest [audiences] that we had')¹¹ and the jazz dances. Of the theatre work, only the National Youth Theatre's *Hamlet*, which drew on the captive schools market, pulled substantial audiences. Quality may have had something to do with this, and even insiders attest to the poor standard of much of the work presented,¹² an inevitable result of budgetary constraints and technical difficulties in what was a highly ambitious pioneering venture.

More important was a central confusion of artistic policy, which the programme exemp-

lifies. The awkward mixture of high art and popular culture (or at least the sort of popular culture seen as worthy by the emergent New Left) – mainstream theatre, poetry, and Stravinsky on the one hand, folk music and jazz on the other – has mostly been seen in retrospect as a failed attempt at ‘mainstream cultural imperialism’,¹³ which refused to acknowledge the sorts of commercial popular culture which working-class people actually *liked*.¹⁴ Journalistic jibes about beards and duffel coats and left-wing intellectuals¹⁵ should have been little surprise.

For many of those involved, *The Maker and the Tool* was at the core of what the venture was about. It was the only amateur, grassroots performance in the festivals and was variously described by insiders as ‘by far the most under-rehearsed and rough work in the festival but also by far the most interesting’,¹⁶ as ‘the work which got closest, and then only in glimpses, to finding some elements of [the] common language of work and art’;¹⁷ and as the prototype of ‘an indigenous form for the British musical’.¹⁸

Others have described it, in retrospect, as ‘the work which seemed to get closest to Fortytwo’s implicit artistic ideal’,¹⁹ and even as ‘the only genuine cultural innovation of the entire Centre 42 venture’.²⁰ Its pioneering attempt to construct an original aesthetic form out of the lives and experiences of working people, and to do so with them as participants rather than passive consumers, began to address Barker’s manifesto commitment to facilitating ‘full participation in the arts’. For Barker, the seeding of the dialogues necessary for that to take place began to happen at the time:

When you joined with the trades unions at that time you drew on a reservoir of skill and ability that made the festivals possible. Work with a Transport Union official and you could forget about your transport problems. Someone from the Bank Employees’ Union could handle and balance six or seven box office outlets simultaneously without a problem. We built a theatre in Leicester out of scaffolding in an ice-rink over a weekend.²¹

Discussions between artists and unionists inevitably ensued, as they did between the

cast and crew of the Leaveners (Barker well remembers the problem of arranging billets for 92 of them in each of the six festival towns)²² and the unionists who billeted them. These were merely seeds, but to expect more immediately would have been naive, as both Geoffrey Reeves and Michael Kustow pointed out at the time. For Reeves, ‘the purpose of Centre 42 is to hot up the climate; we are working for the changes that will take place in ten or twenty years’.²³ And for Kustow:

It may well be that the role which Centre 42 is destined to play ultimately will be that of a squall, a sharp, unruly gust that changes the whole direction of the wind. It may be that a number of individual projects and groups will take root in a particular community, working continuously.²⁴

Bad Timing

That Centre 42 and the venture represented by *The Maker and the Tool* struggled to take root in the early 1960s was partly the result of sheer bad timing. Barker has recently expressed the opinion that Centre 42 really should have happened in 1946 rather than the early 1960s,²⁵ and there are good grounds for such a contention. Firstly, as post-war austerity and memories of the depression of the 1930s were replaced by comparative affluence in the 1950s, and the electoral high point of the 1945 Labour landslide victory gave way to a steady decline in popularity culminating in the disastrous defeat of 1959, confidence in the notion of working-class consciousness that Centre 42 and particularly *The Maker and the Tool* were premised on collapsed, as Britain shifted from a manufacturing to a consumer society. As *The Maker and the Tool* was itself concerned to point out, the old craft skills and pride in workmanship which Parker was celebrating were being steadily destroyed by technologies which rendered them unnecessary.

At the same time, the purchase on working-class consciousness of an indigenous popular culture represented most consistently throughout the festivals, and centrally in *The Maker and the Tool*, by folk music was already proving problematic.²⁶ The accus-



Charles Parker introduces *The Maker and the Tool*. Photo: John Hoppy Hopkins (www.hoppy.be.tf/).

ation of a 'cultural snobbery' which assumed that 'popular equals bad' levelled at Wesker in particular²⁷ was indicative of a substantial cultural blind spot (far from peculiar to Wesker at the time) just at the moment when the emergence of the Beatles was unsettling the dominance of American popular culture and opening up possibilities of a different sort of indigenous, hands-on music-making, and the emergence on television of a grainy working-class realism represented by the popularity of *Z-Cars*, the one-off plays of David Mercer and others, and the documentary work of Denis Mitchell, Ken Loach, and others indicated a radical potential in the 'popular' media.²⁸

Secondly, the possibility of state support, at least theoretically available in 1946, had disappeared by 1960. In 1946, the Arts Council of Great Britain had only just superseded the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), which had been established in 1940. CEMA's terms of reference had included 'the encouragement of music-making and play-acting by the people themselves',²⁹ and a central part of its brief is exemplified by the 'music travellers' scheme,

which placed musicians like Ralph Vaughan Williams in local communities to work with amateur performers between 1940 and 1944.

While much debated, particularly in relation to theatre, some support of amateur activity remained on the agenda in the early years of the Arts Council. This made possible the support into the early 1950s of arts centres, as community centres and bases for amateur and professional activities, of the sort Wesker *et al.* were concerned with. By 1960, however, the Arts Council was committed to a 'policy of professional exclusiveness' more designed to 'control entry to an occupation'³⁰ than to encourage involvement in cultural activity. As early as 1952 the Arts Council's commitment to the almost exclusive support of professional activity is indicated by its description of amateur theatre as a 'problem' for the development of regional theatres, particularly because of its 'strength'.³¹

The stranglehold of this professionalizing (and centralizing) impulse was not loosened till the emergence of the community arts movement made some concessions to amateur involvement in the arts, *via* the notion of

socio-cultural animation, as worthy of state support in the mid- to late-1970s. Centre 42 and the Leavers came at the least propitious of times, half way between the democratic possibilities suggested by CEMA's brief, even in the attenuated form it took in the early years of the Arts Council, and the re-emergence of arts centres and modes of collaboration between amateurs and professionals thrown up by the counter-cultures and the emergence of community arts as a funding category. What this meant at the time was that the sole contribution of the Arts Council to Centre 42 was a £200 grant to commission Wesker's *The Nottingham Captain*. What it could have meant was financial support in response to the twenty requests from Trades Councils for festivals in 1964.

The Legacy

From the perspective of the present day, or even that of Catherine Itzin in *Stages in the Revolution* in 1980,³² it is possible to see direct lines of influence from Centre 42, like the work of McGrath with 7:84 England and Scotland, theorized in *A Good Night Out*, which no doubt took form in the protracted debates with Wesker about the inappropriateness of approaching working-class audiences with middle-class aesthetic forms (such as conventional theatre). Small-scale touring theatre for working-class audiences in non-theatre spaces, community theatre, and connections between artists and sectors of the trade union movement were central features of the 'revolution' Itzin describes in the 1970s, and all of them had been broached by the Centre 42 venture.

The Leavers' statement of aims with which I began is not untypical, and it had immediate effects. Not only did it lead directly to the establishment in 1973 of an amateur theatre group, Banner Theatre of Actuality, which has had a life as both an amateur and/or professional company ever since,³³ but the attempt it represents to construct complex multi-media documentary performances from the grass roots up pioneered techniques which re-emerged in the community-based theatre work which fol-

lowed it. In 1962 it stood, with John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy's early experiments in community theatre (which were happening at much the same time) and Peter Cheeseman's 'Stoke documentaries' (which postdate it), as an important precursor of the alternative and community theatre scene of the 1970s and beyond.

The neglect of *The Maker and the Tool* is no doubt a result of its amateur status, which means it has fallen victim to that general disregard of amateur theatre by theatre historians which Claire Cochrane has recently pointed to.³⁴ But it is perhaps also a result of the fact that, as a multi-media documentary performance piece, highly dependent on music, slides, and film, it is difficult to document. What makes it particularly interesting now, and made it so significant to the Centre 42 venture, is what marginalized it in 1962: it attempted to establish a model for tapping the creativity of working people in its making rather than merely creating a commodity for their passive observation; and it aided in the development of a mode of documentary performance which has been of much more importance in amateur, regional, or fringe theatre than in the professional mainstream. Those examples of the British documentary theatre tradition we know much about tend to be the products of the regional repertory companies which emerged in the post-war years, most notably Peter Cheeseman's work at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, the professional status of which led more naturally to publication or at least critical notice.

Cheeseman's 'Stoke documentaries' owe as much to Parker's best known radio work, the Radio Ballads,³⁵ as to *The Maker and the Tool*, but are no doubt at least as influenced by Parker's attempt to bring the Radio Ballad format to the stage, which Cheeseman does not cite as an influence,³⁶ as by the 'didactic left-wing theatre brilliantly extended by Joan Littlewood out of the German and American documentary traditions', which he does.³⁷ They share with Parker's work an 'associational' technique rather than the didactic mode of conventional left-wing documentary, as reflected in Cheeseman's commitment 'to preserve the contradiction of

viewpoint inherent in every historical event';³⁸ indeed, the Parker Archives offer evidence of an ongoing dialogue between them at the time.

While the work did not find an instantaneous working-class audience,³⁹ Cheeseman had the time (and money) to build one, and was as important as the 1963 success of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* in creating the wave of interest in regional documentary theatre that swept Britain at the end of the 1960s. This interest was picked up both by the small-scale left-wing touring groups of the 1970s and 1980s – perhaps most famously represented by 7:84 Scotland's *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (1973) – and the community theatre movement, for which regional documentary offered a form in accord with the localism which characterized it.

All of these ventures were also influenced by the resurgence of interest in documentary theatre in Germany and America in the 1960s, which produced the wave of publication throughout the English-speaking world from the late 1960s onwards of material on the pre-war work of Piscator, Brecht, the Living Newspapers of the Workers' Theatre Movement and of the American Federal Theatre Project. All this post-dates Parker's initial experiments in documentary performance, and has tended to obscure their significance.

Another influence may be found in the emergence of the amateur participatory 'community plays' which began to appear within the ambit of the amateur theatre in the 1960s and the community arts movement of the 1970s. Some of Parker's work (though not *The Maker and the Tool*) was given currency for the amateur theatre by the 1970 publication of John Lane and Peter Burton's *New Directions: Ways of Advance for the Amateur Theatre*. Written in an attempt to widen the sense of possibility of amateur theatre groups beyond merely 'imitating the professional theatre',⁴⁰ it included a chapter on modes of generating performances, citing examples, including a section on 'mixed media anthologies' which consisted of brief commentary and substantial citation of the Leaveners' *Dog in the Manger* (1961) and a later piece from 1967, *Of One Blood*.⁴¹

Parker's most often acknowledged influence results from his work as a documentary radio features producer with BBC Midlands and particularly his production of the Radio Ballads, with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger and other of the central figures in what has come to be called the Second British Folk Revival. These were based around recorded interviews with working-class people, which were edited and spliced into a montage held together not by the BBC narrational voice which had conventionally been used to mediate such material in earlier versions of *vox pop* radio documentary,⁴² but by songs drawn from the folk idiom or, more commonly, written by MacColl within that idiom.

The most famous of them, *Singin' the Fishing* and *The Big Hewer*, centred on interviews with workers in specific industries, and thus became pioneering attempts to present particular cultures of working-class life. Paget has described them as central to the development of what he referred to in his article in *NTQ* as 'verbatim theatre'.⁴³ He sees this as having emerged from Cheeseman's work on *Hands Up – For You the War Has Ended* (1971) and *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1974), and having been formulated as a method towards the end of the 1970s. He offers a 'checklist' of 'selected' plays through to 1987 which, disappointingly, manages to exclude Parker's work within the mode.

The Second British Folk Revival

The Second British Folk Revival, from which the Radio Ballads emerged, was of major importance to the search for a popular culture which informed the Centre 42 venture. It was so called as a means of distinguishing it from the folk song and dance collecting of Cecil Sharp in the early years of the century, which has conventionally been described as the 'first' (although surveys of the history of folk song collecting, tracing it back through the nineteenth and even eighteenth centuries, indicate it was far from that).⁴⁴ The 'first' revival, like its antecedents throughout Europe, had been concerned to collect relics of an indigenous tradition of

music-making seen as in serious decline under the pressures of social change, from the destruction of rural life by the industrial revolution to the destruction of 'people's culture' by commercialized mass culture, as represented by the stage melodrama and the music hall in the nineteenth century and by popular music in the twentieth.

The aristocratic or middle-class collectors of this music, assembled by Sharp into the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), saw themselves as involved in a rearguard action to preserve (in aspic if necessary) this indigenous popular tradition so as to impart it to teachers for dissemination through the education system and to contemporary high art composers such as Benjamin Britten, Percy Grainger, and Ralph Vaughan Williams as a wellspring from which to construct a truly 'British' high culture.

The second revival was led by working-class 'organic intellectuals' (in Gramsci's sense of the term) like MacColl and A. L. Lloyd, more concerned to revitalize (rather than merely 'collect') the music of an urban industrial proletariat, which they saw as representing a class-based culture of resistance under at least as much threat from the EFDSS as from the depredation of American commercial mass culture.

The revival was thus of importance to the founders of Centre 42, as it laid claim to a special relationship to the bedrock from which the popular culture they sought could be built. This accounts for the role accorded to MacColl, Lloyd, and others in the festivals. Arnold Wesker's perception of the folk tradition as the repository of a class-based culture of resistance is famously represented by his use of the traditional ballad 'The Cutty Wren' to signify an instinctual class hostility in his early play *Chips With Everything*. He was far from alone in having been drawn by this perception towards the Radio Ballads, which were, in a sense, the jewel in the crown of the BBC's interest in British folk song throughout the 1950s. Their interest in a stage adaptation of the Radio Ballad format as part of the festivals was thus fuelled by a shared enthusiasm for the work Parker had already done on radio.

But he had also been experimenting in popular theatre forms for some five years already. Barker's interest, in fact, had been piqued by seeing some of Parker's work in 1961, which he saw as evidence 'of what was happening *under* the arts establishment', of 'a grassroots movement of some sort . . . in response to the centralization of British cultural life'⁴⁵ which the Arts Council seemed bent on bringing about.

From the Harborne Players to the Leaveners

Documentation of Parker's early experiments in popular theatre includes an unpublished essay written in January 1962, '*Dog in the Manger – and After*', held in the Charles Parker Archive,⁴⁶ in which he attempts to 'sum up the experience gained' between 1957 and 1962 and carry it forward, with an eye to the possibility of a performance for the festivals. The experiments began with a performance by the Harborne Players of an adaptation of the Coventry *Nativity Play* in St Peter's Church, Harborne, and continued with *A Meditation for Good Friday*, staged at Easter in 1959 or 1960,⁴⁷ and with *Dog in the Manger*, staged at Christmas in 1961, the latter two of which exist as draft scripts.

Both combine medieval dramas (*A Meditation* including a brief sequence drawn from the York *Crucifixion*, and *Dog in the Manger* adding bits of the Wakefield *Second Shepherds' Play* to the Coventry *Nativity Play*), choral and folk music, documentary material (initially read, but both read and played on tape through loudspeakers in *Dog in the Manger*), and projected slides (and film in *A Meditation*), and both are designed for performance in churches. These experiments thus began with three significant elements: the use of amateur performers in non-theatre spaces; an embrace of new technology and documentary techniques drawn from radio and film; and an attempt to draw on a vernacular popular culture represented by medieval drama and folk song.

The interest in medieval theatre as vernacular popular culture was not peculiar to Parker at the time. The EFDSS had in practice been more interested in collecting dance

than song, which led to their publication of dance-based performance pieces like the mummers' plays in the inter-war years, and there was a resurgence of interest, shared by MacColl and others in the Second Revival, in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁸ As well, 'the first full-scale production of the York Cycle at York in 365 years'⁴⁹ as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951 (itself a post-war attempt to revitalize indigenous cultural traditions) produced a wave of interest in medieval theatre.⁵⁰

Some were attracted by its possibilities as a model for a community-based popular political theatre, as is indicated by Richard Southern's dedication of his 1957 reconstruction of the staging of *The Castle of Perseverance*⁵¹ to the Berliner Ensemble; John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy's embrace of the nativity play form for *The Business of Good Government* in 1960;⁵² and in the steady emergence of open, promenade, and outdoor staging influenced by the academic exploration of medieval staging techniques through the 1960s and 1970s.

Balancing Sound and Vision

Parker's take on medieval theatre was predominantly literary, and both *A Meditation* and *Dog in the Manger* owe more to radio than theatre: as he admitted, his 'preoccupation with the word may be giving me over-emphasis on the sound element without comparable development of the visual'.⁵³ *A Meditation* was sung, read from a lectern, or (including a sequence from the York *Crucifixion*) heard through loudspeakers. The performance accumulates a series of pointed juxtapositions, a 'complex sound pattern of Passion hymns and carols, Scripture readings, documentary recordings culled from newspapers, mystical verse, and readings from books such as *Dying We Live*, *Last Letters from [a] Concentration Camp*, and so on'.

The only concession to the visual, beyond the use of the church as 'setting', took the form of projection of slides and film ('extracts from five art films – Giotto, Raoult's *Miserere*, Goya's *Disasters of War*, the Ravenna Mosaics, and a film of medieval Dutch sculpture') onto a screen above the

chancel steps.⁵⁴ While film added visual interest, Parker felt it had been

too effective, since the live choir could have been dispensed with and the whole song prerecorded with a consequent loss in engagement of the congregation, who were already near to sitting back and entering the twilight of the cinema [a problem exacerbated by the necessity to darken the nave of the church for front projection of the film] rather than sitting forward and participating in any dynamic experience, in this case the validity of the story of the Passion of Christ.⁵⁵

Dog in the Manger in 1961 is a more complicated experiment, and an elaborate exercise within the framework of a church-based nativity play. Film was dropped, and the slide projection was more tightly integrated. Actors were now required to learn their lines rather than read, and sequences from the Coventry *Nativity Play* and the Wakefield *Second Shepherds' Play* were actually, if minimally, performed utilizing lighting and the 'liturgical symbolism in the church – the crib, the cross, the lectern, the pulpit'.

As in *A Meditation*, the performance was made up of bits of the medieval playtexts, biblical quotations, and extracts from contemporary newspapers, spliced into a complicated amalgam of folk song, choral music, hymns, and carols. These are further punctuated by the juxtaposition of slides of religious art or contemporary photographs. The following sequence indicates the technique:

CHOIR: At Bethlehem in Jewry a city there was
Where Joseph and Mary together did pass.

60 LANTERN: SLIDE 15 'THE CENSUS'
And there to be taxed with many one mo'
For Caesar commanded the same should be so.
(Lilt refrain behind.)

L/SPEAKER: The Home Secretary, speaking at Brighton, said, 'Do we need any immigrants?' I must say definitely, after consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the President of the Board of Trade, and others responsible for our economy, that these immigrants do provide a valuable contribution to our labour force. (*The Guardian*, 28.10.61, letter from Eric James.)

61 LANTERN: SLIDE? IMMIGRANT SHIP OR
VIEW OF BIRMINGHAM

CHOIR (cont.): But when they had entered the
city so fair

A number of people so mighty was there

- 61A LANTERN: SLIDE? DESIRABLE RESIDENCE
That Joseph and Mary, whose substance was
small
Could find in the inn there no lodging at all
(*Lilt refrain behind.*)
- 62 LANTERN: SLIDE? SLUM STREET
L/SPEAKER: Lord Waldegrave, Parliamentary
Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, said the
problems connected with nationality and
citizenship were always difficult and complex
. . . But any sovereign country must have the
right to control people from other countries
who came in. . . The Government regretted
that the door had to be ever so gently closed.
(*The Guardian*, 3.11.61.)
- 64 LANTERN: SLIDE? HANDCUFFED WEST
INDIANS AT SOUTHAMPTON
SOLO (*cont.*): Then were they constrained in
a stable to lie
Where horses and asses they used for to tie . . .
L/SPEAKER: The Chairman of Glanford Bridd
Rural Council, yesterday laid the foundation
stone for a £300,000 dogs' home. The sanctuary,
which will house unwanted dogs for life, is
being built on land and from a trust fund
given by Mr Jerry Green, a 75-year-old
property dealer . . .
SOLO (*cont.*): Their lodging so simple they
took it no scorn
But against the next morning our Saviour was
born . . .
- 66 LANTERN: SLIDE 16 'THE ADORATION OF
THE SHEPHERDS'

A Racial and Religious Bias

The performance, produced in conjunction with the Birmingham Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination, was intended as a celebration of the possibility of racial harmony in a multi-cultural city, as Parker's prefatory note explains:

An attempt has been made to apply the story of the Three Kings to the wonderful opportunity of achieving racial harmony which today's situation presents. Broadly speaking, the first King brings the genius of Africa, of the West Indies, of the American negro; the second King the genius of Asia and the great poets and philosophers of India, and the music of the traditional dance of India; and the third King brings to the infant Jesus the genius of the European. In so doing, the developing power of King Herod – which in the original nativity play reaches its dreadful climax in the Massacre of the Innocents – is stopped in full cry, and the play finishes in a triumphant statement of peace and love and brotherhood, combined in our common act of worship.

This was difficult to bring to fruition in 1961, and the production remained, as Barry Lankester (a BBC Midlands duty announcer who had been roped in by Parker to play Herod) describes it, 'an all-white affair'.⁵⁶ It was none the less a source of concern in certain circles: Barker claims that when he went to see it, 'The police turned up, uniformed and Special Branch, and stood outside the door clocking the performance. They took a nativity play seriously as political theatre'.⁵⁷

Parker held afterwards to his 'absolute conviction that if we can find forms of corporate cultural activity it will allow us in a place such as Birmingham to integrate the individual genius of the many races who now make up the city'.⁵⁸ His devout high Anglicanism at this point may have blinded him to the fact that participation in an adapted ritual of the Anglican church was not that 'corporate cultural activity', but what is emerging is some understanding of the possibilities of community development through collaborative cultural activity. Central to Parker's interest in performances in churches was a belief, expressed in 1960, that, 'at the most formative periods in our history as a people',

liturgical practice and devotion enabled a local community to find voice in worship and also find itself in the practice of worship. The breakdown of this system as a truly effective social organization, as a tangible expression of local identity, and as a vehicle for the community voice, is, I believe, responsible for a deep malaise in the local community. . . I am convinced that the genius of the Anglican liturgy, as of the English theatre, truly derives from the period when artist, scholar, and people were intimately connected and shared a common belief in a common language, and when a cultural expression of the people in mystery plays, pageant, folk songs, etc., was at once popular and profound.⁵⁹

While Parker's assumption that the mystery plays constituted a pure cultural expression of 'the people' is debatable, and his implication of their connection to the *Anglican* liturgy is wrong, his interest in them is none the less consonant with his interest in the vernacular culture supposedly tapped by the Folk Revival. Most significant is his early recognition of them as amateur, participatory

theatre, and thus as a useful starting point in his experiments in community-based theatre.

Searching for the Right Synthesis

It should not surprise us that Parker is groping after appropriate theatrical forms, well before Piscator's notions of theatrical montage had circulated widely – their influence on British theatre in the work of Theatre of Action and Theatre Union a distant memory for a very few people, and before Theatre Workshop's *Oh, What a Lovely War!* was to put them back on the agenda in 1963. His experimentation is not so much driven by a knowledge of radical theatre practice as by the impulse of the radio documentary maker, inspired by the potentiality of the 'new' technology of the tape recorder for the gathering and splicing of 'actuality' material.

Parker is only able to cite, as 'existing works which seem to express the same attitude', the American Federal Theatre Project (which he must have known through MacColl), the radio work in docu-drama of Earl Robinson in the USA (one example of which, *The Lonesome Train*, became half of the double bill with *The Maker and the Tool* for the festivals), Laterna Magika (an experimental wing of the Czechoslovak State Film Studio which combined film and live performance, which he had seen in London in 1960 and was later to visit in Prague),⁶⁰ 'some aspects of the folk dance ensemble', and 'the work of the great documentary film makers'.⁶¹

While he admits he has 'as yet failed . . . to find a convincing human visual component' for the performance, he claims to have created

a group of singers, musicians, actors, and technicians, able to enter a church hall at 2 p.m., set it up in three hours, rehearse and perform a highly complicated music verse form in which musicians begin to understand the subtleties of playing behind speech, singers begin to understand the necessity of integrating their performance with the preceding dialogue or documentary; in which technicians slowly begin to understand the complexities of lighting in which one could demonstrate that without an expensive dimmer board but simply a switchboard with fused plugs on it, one could use lighting effectively and transform a church or prison.⁶²

He also admits to having created a 'confused and confusing synthesis of so many elements', but sees this as part of the strength of the venture:

In fact, it is this very complexity which makes them simply [*sic*] to play in production, since it allows so successfully to devolve responsibility into containable 'parcels', and it is this which makes the form important, I believe, for a badly needed, newly emergent, genuinely popular culture. Thus, for instance, in every parish or factory or trade union branch one could today find devoted experts of the camera both still and movie, of the tape recorder and hi-fi equipment. I am slowly beginning to find folk singers and instrumentalists emerge. The interesting thing is that one finds in the church choir and the church organist a preoccupation with words, a capacity to improvise which is vitally necessary in the context of this work, so that I believe this form is almost ready-made for some of the cultural problems which face us today, since in one stroke it could involve existing skills in one corporate artistic experience, and to achieve an effect which is not at the moment possible in the professional art world. The most important thing is that one is not asking the amateur to play out of his league: one is asking him to be essentially himself and provide him with a technique in which he must inevitably be superior to the professional, because the professional cannot be him. Furthermore, I think we have stumbled on the truth in the folk tradition, namely that the richest cultural tradition is one in which the least gifted member of society can well participate in the cultural forms, that socially, creatively, and uniquely the folk forms, of song and dance for instance which are capable of very high development on [*sic*] terms of the gifted performer, also allow the average performer to 'walk with the gods' for the period of his performance, and to communicate this to his audience. I believe that in an attempt to confront the complexities of modern life, the conventional forms have passed beyond the ken of the common man to a degree which is almost authoritarian and certainly enjoins a passive acceptance by the layman of the work of art, and this it seems to me is what invalidates every art festival that is, at the moment, held.⁶³

He then lays out plans for the establishment of a 'highly integrated and competent 'shock group', able to go out to parish churches or miners' welfares and organize local performers in this form'. This, he continues, should 'start with existing, if mildewed, traditional observances in churches', attempting a 'revitalizing' of the ceremonial dates of the

Christian calendar, 'in terms which transcend the narrow and exclusively Christian approach (in which in the opinion of the writer the early church offers a precedent)':

One must look to extending popular cultural forms which can be developed – the brass band, the choral society, and perhaps the amateur dramatic society, if they can ever be weaned away from Noël Coward. Above all, one must look to the contemporary skills, to the emergent modern dance movement, and hand-in-hand with all this there must begin to emerge the systematic and critical collection of urban and industrial folk lore.⁶⁴

One could thus establish 'a company, essentially amateur, which could demonstrate a cultural potential in the common people and in the existing traditional cultural patterns', and perform 'anywhere there are four walls and seats'. It could 'employ forms which are flexible enough to allow for an increasingly direct participation by local resources, and should indeed conceive itself as having succeeded when it no longer needs to exist'. It

would provide a means for co-ordinating the multifarious and fragmenting activities of our society by being able to give spiritual expression to everything, from pigeon-fancying to stamp collecting. It could also provide experience in common work to transcend religious, politic [*sic*] and racial differences, and find a way of asserting a common humanity without the loss of local identity. . . . [It] should also provide a consistent and developing source of local information, of submerged cultural activity, of submerged folk culture, and above all, of the tough and continuing genius of the vernacular in speech and in custom, combating cosmopolitanism but asserting internationalism.⁶⁵

He saw the developing technologies of radio, film, and television as central to the process:

The microphone and the television camera have a unique power instantaneously to capture and convey human personality in its infinite variety. The last stronghold of the national genius is, in my estimation, and in my professional and personal experience, the vernacular speech, and the world of idiom and image and subtle human relationships which it reflects.⁶⁶

The extent of the vision is reflected in a later begging letter written to W. Byng Kenrick requesting the use of 'The Grove', a Victorian

mansion which had been bequeathed to the city by his father on the understanding that his son be allowed to see out his life in it, as a 'workshop of the arts' for the Leaveners:

the relationship between the new technical media and the old established art forms has a parallel in the relationship between on the one hand folk music and the folk art forms, the richness of vernacular speech, the vigour of vernacular artefacts – and on the other hand the sophisticated, highly conscious and articulate forms achieved and developed within the orthodox arts.

The development of tape and cine clubs, he continues, means the new technology is in the hands of ordinary people, whom he envisaged as 'potentially, a new race of comprehensive artists inhabiting equally the world of technology and the world of art. . . . Give me the resources and in ten years Birmingham could be a new Athens for the world at large.'⁶⁷ While Kenrick remained unimpressed, Parker had thus, by 1961, laid out a highly idiosyncratic blueprint for a community-based cultural project which prefigures the later community arts movement, and embraced sufficient of the central concerns of the Centre 42 venture to evince some interest.

Preparation of 'The Maker and the Tool'

Parker's was one of few responses to Barker's statement of 'basic principles', and he homed in on a central problem:

At the moment I have a suspicion that most of us are still only paying lip service to the belief in the creativity of the common people. I believe that only when we find the way to release this creativity will we find the answer to the root problems of our generation.

As a solution he proposed the necessity to 'develop means of engendering direct creative activity in the common people', suggesting that

it is not enough to take a Centre 42 conceived and produced production of a play to a Trades Council Festival. The attempt should be to provide a service of Trade Festival organizers who could go to an area and out of it produce the work for that area.⁶⁸

While *The Maker and the Tool* would not fulfil this suggestion, he was intending it as a model for work that would.

What he was proposing is described, in a handwritten note given to Barker, as 'a *Dog in the Manger* type symposium on the theme *The Maker and the Tool*'.

In general the intention would be to express the developing relationship between man and his tools; the genius of the hand – four fingers and the opposed thumb, plus the brain, plus the word and the consequent capacity to inherit and pass on skills and tools; the sense of identification the old craftsman had with his tools; the way in which men will talk of their tools and so on, up to the present dilemma – of such accretion [*sic*] of power to the hand of man that the old wisdom and sense of fitness and proportion is in danger of disappearance. So to an analysis of the implication of machine tool over chisel, of excavator over shovel etc. Increasingly blind, mechanical, ruthless force replacing 'cunning' and loving skill. The consequent spiritual loss in the working man. So to a statement of a sort of philosophy of the tool. It must be used with love, not force. It must be the tool for the job; it must be kept bright by use, and so on; leading to a statement of *man* as the tool, of the necessary relationships between governor and the governed, manager and the managed. Fascism as brute amateurism in management. So to a re-assessment of God and man, misconceived in authoritarian terms by most of us.⁶⁹

While admitting this may sound like 'heavy going', he claimed that the multi-media techniques he had been developing could render it 'gay, colourful, challenging, and entertaining', and finished by stressing the extent to which it 'lends itself to the controlled involvement of *local* resources and genius . . . in terms of actuality tape recordings and photographs and also local performers where possible'. Parker's commitment to the project was indicated by his intention to use his four weeks' annual holiday from the BBC to record interviews in each of the festival towns, for the six different versions which his amateur cast had to rehearse in the brief time (a week) between each performance.

The proposal had a number of things to recommend it, not the least of which was that, as an amateur project, it wasn't going to cost much, although it did entail the purchase of some £2,500-worth of equipment

(lights, rostra, back-projection screens, tape recorders, projectors, etc.). Besides, Barker has claimed in retrospect that Parker was 'very difficult to shake off'.⁷⁰

Parker's work began with a wide programme of reading, including the Bible, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, books on the medieval cycle plays and the craft guilds, a biography of Aneurin Bevan, *Aeschylus and Athens* by George Thomson (whose wife Katharine was to conduct the Clarion Choir for the performances), and books on the nature of work, including F. W. Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management*, all of which form the basis of an immense file of notes and transcriptions.⁷¹ More ephemeral reading is evidenced by a further thick file of press clippings, etc.⁷²

Preparations also entailed meetings with Trades Councils seeking advice on appropriate interviewees around specific industries,⁷³ and the recording (on 89 tapes)⁷⁴ and transcribing of interviews.⁷⁵ As well, he commenced a correspondence campaign which he admitted (in a letter to Paddy Whannell of the BFI, requesting advice on likely film sequences) was 'a bit of a struggle galvanizing the local film and camera clubs to take an interest'.⁷⁶ This led to further requests for material from sources as diverse as the National Coal Board, the Educational Foundation for Visual Arts, the Gas Council, and a local hosiery factory in Leicester.

He also wrote requesting tailor-made songs from major figures in the Folk Revival (MacColl and Seeger, initially described as essential to the process, having not come to the party), including Ian Campbell, Cyril Tawney, Johnny Handle, and Matt McGinn. The latter received the following from Parker along with a request for a song about shoemaking:

I shall hope at the end of September to have completed the remainder which will probably be as a sort of 'Act II', developing from the hosiery into a sort of contrapuntal contrast of electronics with docking, to which there is a sort of logic in that the argument develops from this first half into a statement about the positive and negative implications of mass output – 'be fruitful', but how is it that we become bored as well? which is the substance of the Leicester hosiery material, and then into electronics as the apotheosis of this

challenge and the startling way in which it is in such absolute contrast to the medieval primitivism of the docks so far as human beings are concerned. So that the ultimate statement will be an articulated humanized assertion of man as the tool to be honoured and respected and integrated into his own identity as Man. Sounds awfully sententious but I think it will work.⁷⁷

Undeterred, McGinn duly produced one of the show's best-remembered songs, about the superiority of leather to synthetic material, entitled 'It Breathes'.

Johnny Handle was sent a no less daunting letter of request:

In the throes of trying to get a form for *The Maker and the Tool*, and at the moment I am going very carefully into the Prometheus myth, both in the version by Aeschylus and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* on the one hand, and the story of Noah on the other (in the Mystery Plays the Noah play is always that most associated with the crafts) and the idea of man by his hands making the vessel of his own salvation can be given a philosophic interpretation to meet this idea I have in *The Maker and the Tool*.

Handle may have been relieved, though, by the following:

As regards specific points for you though, I really feel you will be better to draw entirely out of your experience and out of the actuality itself.⁷⁸

He took the advice, and wrote a song about pick and shovel mining, an incomplete version of which appears in Parker's draft script.

'The Maker and the Tool' in Performance

The Maker and the Tool was not what we might now describe as a community-based project. It was the work of a man who saw himself, as Barker had described the 'professional artists' drawn together by Centre 42, as 'ready and willing to help' an 'inarticulate' people 'find their new ways of expression'. At this stage, Parker's faith in 'the creativity of the common people' did not extend to relinquishing the role of firm guiding hand, even to the point of writing and delivering author's prologues.

The Maker and the Tool had a cast and crew of nearly sixty, including the Birmingham

Clarion Choir, a folk group, a group of dancers from two Birmingham schools, along with teams of sound, slide, and film technicians. The account which follows is based on Parker's draft scripts, which offer little about the way in which the visuals contributed to the overall effect, and nothing about the work of the small troupe of dancers, but indicate something of the way the performance worked.

Performances took place on 'a series of rostra extending into the audience as an apron/arena stage, with the audience on three sides, and the fourth side terminated by a screen for cinematograph and slide projection (both back and front projection)'.⁷⁹ All this, plus lights, projectors, and sound equipment, including eight speakers distributed throughout the space, was laboriously assembled in a range of non-theatre venues (the social club rooms at Saltley Gas Works in Birmingham, for example) for two or three weekend performances in each festival town.

Technical equipment was all operated from within the audience space, including two very hot 1000-watt slide projectors for the showing of over 300 glass slides, with a closed fist held over the lens and gradually opened as a substitute for a mechanical iris, all requiring 'split-second timing', according to Bill Shreeve, a worker at Saltley Gas Works who was one of the projectionists.⁸⁰ Performers were to prepare in full view of the audience, so as to

familiarize the audience with them as human beings *before* the show starts, eschewing all advantages of surprise and shock tactics as suitable only to a theatre conceived as warfare. Our purpose is to present this audience *to itself*, and our powers in technical equipment and resources are so overwhelming in creating effect, that all efforts must be made to humanize the activity (p. 1).

The performance opened with a long explanatory prologue from Parker himself (see illustration on page 45.) After a brief statement of an intention to move beyond the assault upon the senses which entertainment conventionally constitutes and to establish a more intimate interrelation between performer and audience, he continued:

Oh for a muse of fire! That would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene . . .

Shakespeare . . . leading off in *Henry the Fifth*
. . . all right for him, but for me – well, princes
act nightly on our television screen . . . the
swelling scene is in 3D and stereo, and we
don't know whether we're coming or going
from *The Archers* to breakfast time . . . but
concealed in the chaos of our indiscriminate,
half-fact-half-fiction, half-journalism, half-
drama, mass entertainment – is a Muse of fire
all right!

- 4 LINE PROJECTION *Possibly introductory
sequence from Gas Council film What's in a
Flame?*
- 5 AUTHOR The documentary cine-camera . . .
a Kingdom for a stage? Well perhaps not
quite, but here – about this –
- 6 F.O.H. LANTERN *superimposes on moving picture
which is faded out behind it a panoramic (?aerial)
photograph of Wellingborough, or of a large and
recognizably local boot and shoe factory.*
(NOTE: *this and the following sequence tailored
for each particular town.*)
- 7 AUTHOR Princes to act? – by which
Shakespeare meant simply the real life
characters instead of actors playing them –
Well I can give you – the voices of real life.
(p. 2–3)

This marked the first use of taped 'actuality':

- 8 TAPE A (26-3½, Mr Smith)
I started in the boot and shoe trade when
I was fourteen, you see/
(30-2½, Mrs Cross)
It's a hard job and yet it comes easy to you
like . . .
(32-4¼, Mr Murton)
You've got to live with leather to know what
leather's like/
(33-4, Mr Murton, *cont'd*)
The feel of the knife going through the leather,
continued use over the years, you just get
used to it. . . .
- 9 B.P. (LANTERN) RIGHT
- 10 B.P. LEFT
*Take over from F. O. H. Lantern to comment
visually upon the actuality as appropriate, with
close-ups of shoe-mending operations etc.* (p. 3)

Having thus introduced the technical facilities from which the performance was to be

constructed Parker moved on to quote from
Robbie Burns:

O wad some Powr the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us:

Well, we've got it! everytime we look at a
holiday snapshot, or listen to a disc, or a tape
recording . . . we can see ourselves as others
see us . . . (p. 3)

But 'it's not just a question of letting rip with
cameras and tape recorders' as the reality
thus captured is often contradictory. 'It's what
you *do* with the giftie that matters', which in
this case is to

try as honestly as we can to tell you what *we*
feel about what we see, by singing, by dancing,
by speaking poetry or quoting from Trade
Union Rule Books, or Manuals of Instruction,
or whatever we feel may be appropriate and
revealing. And if this means singing from
sacred oratorio one minute and dancing to
jazz the next – it'll be because we mean it and
because Hayden's [*sic*] 'Creation', for instance,
says something we can't say any other way,
and if that means living with the idea of God
as well as *Das Kapital* and the Quantum theory
and precision engineering – well, that as they
say – is life! (p. 4–5)

He then closed with a legitimization of mon-
tage as an artistic strategy:

This work is absolutely based in tape record-
ings such as you've already heard, which
I made earlier this year in six Trades Festival
towns, from people working in industries the
local Trades Council directed me to as repre-
sentative of the district; as a result you'll be
darting about quite a bit from Gas to Elec-
tronics, Hosiery, Boot and Shoe, Docks and
Coalmines. We will 'make strange combin-
ations out of common things' as Shelley says
in *Prometheus Unbound* – but we have good
precedent for this – the Bible no less, 'for
always the Hebrew poets are striving to relate
all things to one another, seeking for harmony
between the actions of mankind and the
larger movements of the Universe in which
man's life is set'. (Lawrence Binyon, quoting
De Quincey in *The Bible Designed to be Read as
Literature*.) (p. 5)

Following a blackout, the performance moved
into its first sequence, which attempted just
such a relating of the 'actions of mankind' to

'the larger movements of the Universe'. It is described as opening with a single light picking out a group of dancers moving to the sound of an offstage bass soloist (accompanied by an orchestra in the draft, which was reduced to an accompanist by the time of the performances) singing, from Haydn's *Creation*, 'In the beginning God created the heav'n and the earth'. This was intercut with taped speech, inserted into the natural breaks in the music:

22 TAPE B During the first week, the size of the fires should not exceed twelve inches in depth, tapering in two feet to nothing.

(Instructions for starting up and general working of Woodall-Duckham Silica Continuous Vertical Retorts, p. 8)

23 BASS SOLO (*cont'd*)
And the earth was without form and void . . .

24 TAPE B Drying out silica settings, it is essential that as large a volume of air as possible be drawn through them. (*Ibid.*, p. 7)

25 BASS SOLO (*cont'd*)
And darkness was upon the face of the deep.

26 TAPE B Conditions . . . stabilize. Fuel beds kept to the instructed depth. (*Ibid* p. 9) (p. 6)

As the full chorus softly picked up Haydn's music ('And the spirit of God/Mov'd upon the face of the waters'), the script suggests either the beginning of a general lighting of the action or visuals ('a dramatically shot lump of coal? Or a domestic coal fire flaming?') The chorus sang 'Let there be light/ And there was Light!', and the explosion of volume on the second 'Light!' cued a slide of an 'interior shot of retort, white hot, or of coke oven discharging, or of some other dramatic and incandescent gas works sequence', to be accompanied by an appropriate taped sound effect 'which either segues or tops orchestral playout' (p. 7).

The spectacular juxtaposition of the moment of divine creation and an industrial process then gave way to 'actuality' tape of a workman's awe-struck description of his first day of work in Fulham Gas Works. This is followed by another piece of 'actuality':

I suppose one of the most wonderful discoveries of the human race was the discovery of

fire, you see that made men independent of temperature, they could live and exist where they couldn't before. (p. 7)

Technology then yielded to the live human voice as a Narrator read from a book:

Prometheus . . . tamed fire which, like some beast of prey most terrible, but lovely, played beneath the frown of man, and tortured to his will iron and gold, the slaves and signs of power. . . .

He gave man speech, and speech created thought,
Which is the measure of the universe;
And science struck the thrones of earth and heaven. . . .

(Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*)

(p. 7)

He then looked up from the book, and gave a brief free-verse account of William Murdoch's discovery of gas while smoking in front of a coal fire, which concluded thus:

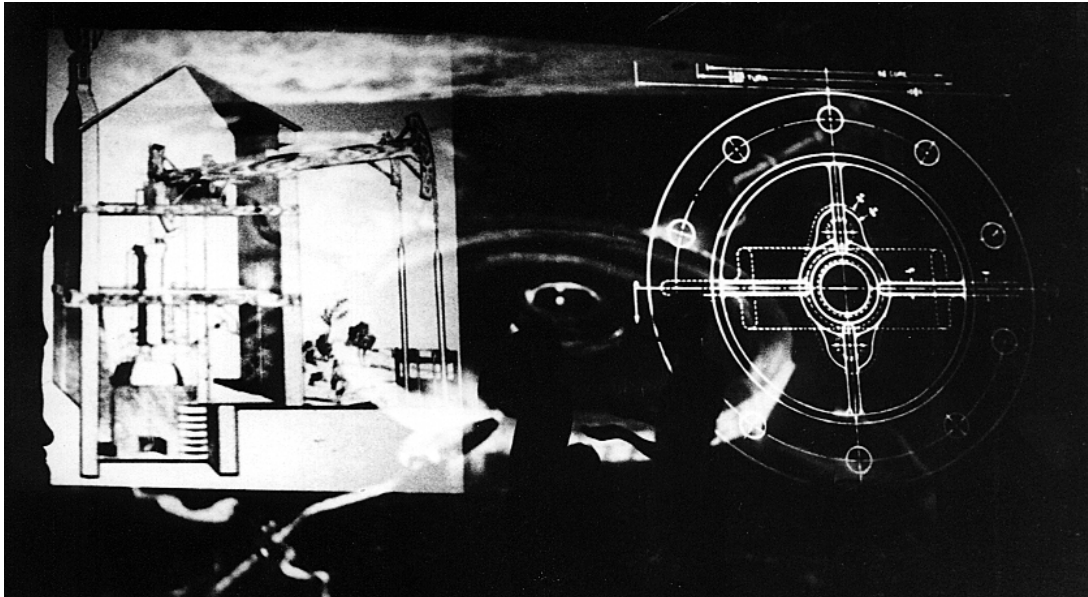
Then knocking out his pipe
He packed the bowl
With that same smoking coal.
Blocked off the top
And forces the jet
To splutter from the ivory mouthpiece,
The jet . . . he lit.
And William Murdoch
Has made and mastered
Coal gas.

(p. 8)

A solo singer then capped that sequence and facilitated a shift to the next *via* the first specially written song, 'The Hand of Man' (a recurring leitmotif as the show progressed). This marked a shift from divine creation and the Promethean taming of fire, symbolized on a human scale by the spectacular firing of a coking oven and the domestic simplicity of Murdoch's discovery of gas, to the day-to-day level of ordinary speech, and from the soaring choral music of Haydn to the unadorned matter-of-factness of folk song.

42 SINGER
The hand of man has given him
Wealth beyond compare;
Wisdom which his industry
Awakes for all to share . . .

42A INSTRUMENTAL *Tape B music behind*
(?accordion?)



Above: slide projection for the blast furnace sequence, *The Maker and the Tool*. Below: a projected 'dramatic and incandescent gas works sequence'. Photos: John Hoppy Hopkins (www.hoppy.be.tf/).



44 TAPE (24-2½, Mr Tom Cresswell)
The handing down . . . of information gathered.
I think this is the only way that one can
expect progress. . . I think it is obligatory
to do this.

44A SINGER
But dare he learn the lesson
That his making makes the rule

That greater than the maker
Is the maker and the tool.

44B INSTRUMENTAL (*Banjo/Fiddle*) *Take behind
and modulate to intro. for Apprentice song.* (p. 8)

This was carried, *via* more 'actuality' record-
ing a workman's sense of 'obligation' to im-

part skills through apprenticeship, into the jaunty 'Apprentice Song', written by Ian Campbell and performed by his Folk Group, which went on to become one of the best known folk groups of the 1960s and 1970s. This was again intercut with 'actuality', in the style of the Radio Ballads, including the following:

You're teaching a chap, you're teaching him
with your tools . . . you're bringing that body
to you and he's taking you to himself . . . you
come together. (p. 9)

As the song concluded, the Narrator read a *Birmingham Gazette* report of the dedication of the Soho Foundry in 1796:

'May the Establishment', said Mr Matthew Boulton, 'be ever prosperous; may it give birth to many useful arts and inventions; may it prove beneficial to mankind, and yield comfort and happiness to all who may be employed in it'. (p. 9A)

This opening reveals the basic building blocks and techniques of the performance. A montage of disparate material, presented as direct audience address, song (choral and folk), readings from documentary and literary texts, taped speech (both 'actuality' and readings from documentary material), slides, film, and field recordings of appropriate sound effects, is pieced together with no explanatory links, leaving the spectator with the task of making sense of it. The strategy thus far has been to dignify work as creativity aimed at universal social benefit.

The next section took on Boulton's wish by a juxtaposition of Haydn's version of the creation of the universe, on the one hand –

Now vanish before the holy beams
The gloomy shades of ancient night
Now chaos ends, and order, and order fair
prevails. (p. 10)

– and, on the other hand, the clear historical indication that it didn't. A solo tenor voice singing about 'hell's spirits' sinking in 'the deep depths to endless night' as the 'holy beams' cast asunder 'ancient night' is intercut with a Narrator reading from historical texts, culminating in Gladstone ('This intoxic-

ating augmentation of wealth and power . . . entirely confined to the classes of property') and Marx ('Nowhere do we find a more shameful squandering of labour power than in England . . . land of machinery'). This was set against projected slides, 'scenes of social consequences of the Industrial Revolution, terrace houses, black smoke, etc.' (p. 10) and then moved to:

70 CHORUS Despairing, cursing rage
Attends their rapid fall . . .

71 TAPE A (Mr Webb, 1-4)
Heartbreaking job . . . coal stacking. . . Put
five or six cwt. on a barrow and wheel it up
a plank and tip it and come back, fill it up
again, just monotonous hard work, they'd be
sitting on the end of a long shift, they'd be
doubled up, good strong fourteen, fifteen-
stone men, with exhaustion, just flat out.

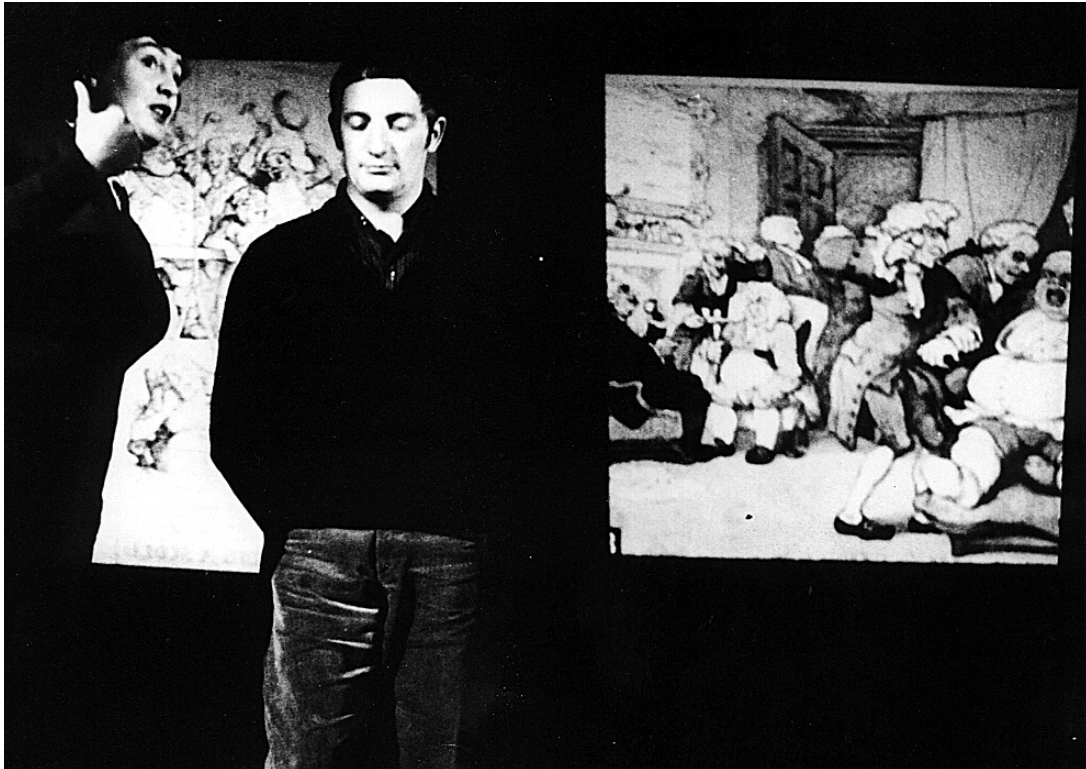
72 CHORUS A new created world, a new
created world
Springs up, springs up at God's command. (p. 11)

And back to 'The Hand of Man' song, alternated between chorus and solo voice, with its reiterated refrain:

But dare he learn the lesson
That his making makes the rule
That greater than the maker
Is the maker and the tool. (p. 12)

The brutal inequity of the 'new created world' of the Industrial Revolution was then underlined through a sequence which juxtaposed readings from a National Coal Board pamphlet on the formation of coal and taped 'actuality' in which miners and mining engineers talk about their relationships with mining machinery, leading into a juxtaposition of readings from *Prometheus Unbound* ('prodigious shapes/Huddled in grey annihilation, split,/Jammed in the hard black deep') against further 'actuality' offering descriptions of the hardships of pick-and-shovel mining. This was then further intercut with Johnny Handle's song:

Once I had a pick and shovel
Working down the mine,
Hewing, bending, filling, pulling,
Sweating all the time.
From shoulder to the coal



Rehearsing slide projection for *The Maker and the Tool*. Photo: John Hoppy Hopkins (www.hoppy.be.tf/).

My arm was a shovel,
Muscle and pick together,
Swinging at the double for I never had
no trouble
Working, working the coal. (p. 14–15)

This sequence is concerned to contrast the gradual mastery of new, technologically advanced tools by the working miner with attempts to establish a managerial prerogative to control and de-skill the work process. The fact that Handle's song was not finished at the time the draft was written allows, *via* Parker's notes in the script, an insight into his strategies of composition. After a brief sequence of 'actuality' quotes on trade skills and tools, the script calls for a third verse 'on apprehension at change, new tools, etc.' (p. 16). This is followed by more 'actuality' on the introduction of machinery into the pits, and then another note on a missing verse:

Verse in minor key? or 'soured' version of first tune – amplifying this dilemma existing between engineering 'neatness' and precision, and human, practical *organic* needs on the job at the face.

More 'actuality' follows, leading to another note: 'verse perhaps incorporating cue 121 [the preceding line], on the benefits of real exchange of experience between designer/engineer, and operator' (p. 17). This demonstrates how, both here and in the Radio Ballads, song is used as the core of a thematic unit built out of an associational pattern of accumulating juxtapositions, which then becomes a step in the developing argument of the piece.

This thematic unit was brought to a close with the following:

131 TAPE A (Mr Cresswell, 20-5¼)
It has to be a unity of people, a common acceptance of understanding.

132 NARRATOR Refused!

133 TAPE B (Mr Tom Mosley, 17-3)
I should say progress is the product of a minority, same as inventions emerge from individual minds, the majority aren't interested!

134 NARRATOR Refused!

135 TAPE B (Mr Roy Harris, 18-7)

The fact that it is a team job appears to lessen the personality it has to the individual man.

136 NARRATOR Refused!

The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
The skill which wields the elements, the thought
Which pierces the dim universe like light,
Self-empire, and the majesty of love;
For thirst of which . . . they fainted.
(*Prometheus Unbound*)

137 TAPE B Entrusting to management all the large mass of knowledge which in the past was in the heads of the workers, and lay also in their physical ability and skill.

138 NARRATOR They? and be damned! what right hae they
To meat or sleep or light o' day?
Far less to riches, pow'r or freedom
But what your lordship likes to gie them . . .
(Robert Burns, *Address of Beelzebub to the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Breadalbane*)

139 TAPE B The insistence . . . on the right of management, which again and again and again has proved to be a far more serious block to the improvement of industrial relations than profits.
(*Ernest Bevin* by Alan Bullock)

140 TAPE A (Mr Mosley, 16-1¼)

There's men develop a kind of roof sense, they can detect a defective roof before the rest . . .

141 TAPE A (Mr Wm. Leek, 24-6¾)

You get that feeling of that weight above you all the time . . . (p. 19-20)

Following a further quote from the Burns poem, the script moves into its next thematic block, the first clear statement of the emergence of class conflict, firstly through the singing of the nineteenth-century industrial folk ballad, 'The Coal Owner and the Pitman's Wife', in which the latter consigns the former to Hell, and secondly through a piece of 'actuality' in which a miner describes his grandfather, around the turn of the century, walking 190 miles home rather than break a strike after being sent in search of work. The sequence is capped by another piece of 'actuality' which is to be reiterated several times in the closing sequence of the performance: 'If a tool is up to its perfection there's no need for bullying' (p. 22).

The draft then draws on a block of material from the boot and shoe trade in Wellingborough, described by the Narrator as 'the Crispin trade'. This opens by intercutting a

description of a fifteenth-century church carving of a shoemaker at work with contemporary 'actuality' of workers describing the use of hand tools for leatherwork, and finishes with a speech from the Narrator:

Five hundred years . . .
Carved in the oak.
The man, carving the man
Carving the rose
In leather.
Each in his trade
Working the nature of the grain to beauty;
To bring back life to sap and sinew
Long since dry;
Making a flower
To decorate a shoe,
To decorate a church,
To decorate a world
Made beautiful . . . (p. 24)

This brings back Haydn, this time with the beautiful aria 'With Verdure Clad' from the *Creation*, again intercut with 'actuality':

174 SOPRANO SOLO (*Creation*, p. 29)

With verdure clad the fields appear
Delightful to the ravished sense;
By flowers sweet and gay . . .

175 TAPE A: TRY a (40-6)

'I'm doing wax rows – they're fancy rows round the punching.'

(OR) b (Mrs Cross, 30-5)

'I like to see 'em look nice when they're finished.'

(OR) c (Mrs Lovell, 34-4½)

'There, there you are now, they're ever so nice to do.' . . .

176 SOPRANO SOLO

Enhanced is the charming sight
Enhanced is the charming sight.

177 TAPE A: TRY a (40-7)

'If you enjoy the work you're doing, I think it helps you a lot. You seem to put more into it . . . and if you think it's worthwhile you make a better job on the whole.' . . .

178 (OR) b (Mrs Cross, 30-3½)

'It's the only job that's seen when the slipper's finished like – the work that's finished – all the other like covered up as you might say. It's on the top you see.'

(NOTE: duration must not exceed 08')

179 SOPRANO SOLO

Here fragrant herbs their odours shed;
Here shoots the healing plant,
Here shoots the healing plant . . . (p. 24-5)

The draft also includes at this point a pencilled addition, 'new petal', presumably

referring to the use of a sequence of slides of an opening flower petal, much enlarged, to which a number of the accounts of the performance refer as one of its more successful moments, at which visuals, 'actuality', music, and live performance came together, once again linking the apparently mundane application of craft skills, creativity, and divine creation.

This section culminates in a violent juxtaposition which carries us from the romanticized image of craft skills as creativity to the brutality of mechanization:

187 NARRATOR

By hands alone
the difficult
innocent shape
of truth is felt.

By the bone's edge
and the skin's curve
the wise blood
the searching nerve.

However far
the truth extends,
its source
is at the finger ends.

(Marie de la Welch, 'Hands', 1929, *A Crafts Anthology*, ed. James T. Bailey, Cassell, 1953)

188 TAPE B (EFFECTS)

Revolution press behind:

189 TAPE A (Mr Cannell)

'I'd 'a been doing it 40 years when it happened and I'm 63 now. I lost the little finger and that one down to the second joint and that one down to the first on the right hand. . . .'

190 TAPE B (EFFECTS)

Revolution press up and down . . .

191 TAPE A

'Oh that was an accident years ago when I was a boy on a machine; the first finger . . . it hasn't held me back . . . only from going in the army naturally . . . well I'd just 's leif've went with the other chaps. . . .' (p. 25-6)

This leads us, *via* Shakespeare's Henry V's speech to his troops on the proud display of war wounds on 'St Crispian's Day', into a sequence of dates detailing the development of the industry, from its initial mechanization in 1859 through the formation of a union in 1874 and a sequence of industrial victories culminating in the 1961 'General Training Scheme for Young Operatives from

School Leaving Age'. A reading by the Narrator of the parties to this agreement is closed off by a return to the Henry V speech, thus suggesting a connection between union struggle, industrial injuries, and pride at injuries sustained in war.

'With Verdure Clad' is 'lilted' beneath the final speech, thus drawing divine creativity into juxtaposition with the construction of a union agreement, and then sung as a bridge to the reciting of the children's rhyme, 'There's the church, and there's the steeple,/ Open the doors . . . and there's the people', which returns us to the simple beauty of the human hand.

From here the draft moves into another sequence, first detailing through 'actuality' the craft skills of the leather worker and lamenting their passing in the face of developing technologies of mass production, capped by Matt McGinn's song, 'It Breathes', which emerges from the reiterated use in the 'actuality' of the word 'breathes' as a means of distinguishing leather from synthetic materials:

Synthetic skins, synthetic styles,
Man-made fibres and men make piles . . .
But though we're very clever it's life makes
leather

As it breathes, it breathes, it breathes. (p. 33)

Parker, like 'the Hebrew poets', is clearly 'seeking for harmony between the actions of mankind and the larger movements of the Universe in which man's life is set', and doing so through a process of violent and surprising juxtapositions (like Eisenstein's 'collision montage') concerned to dignify labour, including the 'labour' of union activism, as divine creativity in microcosm.

The point having by now been well and truly made, he is able to move into the central argument of the piece, which he does, after a section on the hosiery industry, through the 'contrapuntal' juxtaposition of craft skills and creativity turned into the boredom of repetitive work in the electronics industry in Hayes and the 'medieval primitivism' of the Bristol docks which he referred to in his letter to McGinn.

The Bristol docks material offers some of the most powerful 'actuality', as fine hand

work and 'scissors and tweezers and needles' give way to the ugliness of the bag hook ('the only tool that actually belongs to us') and exhausting physical labour. The brutality of the work is mirrored in its mode of organization:

There's no training, you just come on the docks you are accepted at the Registration Board, told to report to the Control Point – 'The Pen' as we call it . . . sheep . . . after that he's on his own in what we call 'The Jungle'. Oh it's the jungle, oh it's the law of survival isn't it . . . You fight your way to the front and he'll say 'Not you, keep your hook down' and then you're clamouring for someone else. . . .
(p. 44)

It is none the less out of this bleak material, once again held together by a commissioned song (by Cyril Tawney, another important figure in the Folk Revival), that Parker's closing point gradually emerges, first in the 'actuality':

If you are a carpenter, you look after your chisel, you look after your plane, keep it sharp, if you're in engineering you look after your other tools, you make sure your micrometer, your slide rule is all working. Well, it's the same with us, we're like tools. But we're not getting the appreciation that a tool deserves, we're not kept sharp so we can work without these constant irritations that beset us in the dock industry. The tool's not doing its job, the tool's being neglected, in fact it's being misused.
(p. 52)

This is picked up in another:

And do you know, I believe that man himself is a tool, I think that he'll perfect his own use. I think that man will learn much more too, that he can only become effective, as a tool, in shaping human life only to the extent that other men are also responding in the same way. This is why there must be this absolutely close relationship, even between men who have different thoughts you know, the more they discuss them, the more they argue. The more they act together I think, the more each man will retain his own individuality in the sense that every sort of personality is quite different.
(p. 52c)

These half-formed thoughts are then given a broader political significance by a quotation,

read by the Narrator, from Aneurin Bevan's *In Place of Fear*:

The only political system consistent with the needs of a modern industrial community is democracy . . . where you train workers to make the blueprints of modern industrial machines, to interpret the blueprints, make and work the machines, you are digging the grave of political dictatorship. . . . (p. 55A)

The performance was brought to a rousing close on this plea for workers' control, reiterating the title song written by Beryl Pryce, who sang in the choir:

The hand of man has given him
Wealth beyond compare
Wisdom which his industry
Awakes for all to share
But dare he learn the lesson
That his making makes the rule
That greater than the maker
Is the maker and the tool.
(p. 55B)

The Aftermath and Follow-through

The Maker and the Tool was an immensely ambitious undertaking. Parker later admitted to holding 'well-nigh impossible' expectations of his amateur cast and a crew of 'mostly working people', and to having merely achieved the level of 'the public performance of a workshop'.⁸¹ None the less, as Geoffrey Reeves pointed out at the time, it played to 'small enthusiastic houses, although rarely many of the people whose work it dealt with'.⁸² Their responses are probably reflected in Clive Barker's memories of it:

When it worked, and bits of it did work, it was like being in another world. The experience of the aural, visual, live, electronic media was fantastic, but at other times there was so much going on that the mind couldn't sort it all out, and you were left sort of saying 'Help'.⁸³

A *Birmingham Post* reviewer couched a similar complaint in more patronizing terms: 'With only two ears and two eyes, I felt like crying for help. Surely, art for the people must above all be simple and direct'.⁸⁴

One other friendly reviewer expressed similar concerns, but noted the importance of the venture's use of 'workers' own words



The dancing troupe, the Clarion Choir and Katharine Thomson (downstage centre) conducting.
Photo: John Hoppy Hopkins (www.hoppy.be.tf/).

about their jobs', and particularly noted that the participation of workers from the EMI factory in Hayes in 'the production of some of the material used' in the performance 'undoubtedly assisted in the development of the atmosphere of support' for the festival. Also, he claimed,

Workers who have mastered the technique of colour photography and slide projection are now considering going into fields other than portraying their annual holidays in photographs and films. Workers fortunate enough to own tape recorders are also discussing how to use their instruments for other things besides taping their favourite pieces of music off the radio, or recording the kids playing.

He saw this as 'of considerable significance for the trade union movement',⁸⁵ but there was little indication that many agreed with him at the time. When Birmingham Trade Council Festival Committee Secretary Harry Baker wrote to Centre 42 offering support for

a 1964 Festival, he expressed the Committee's enthusiasm for more 'local talent', suggesting approaches to 'our Local College of Drama and Music', 'drama clubs', and 'certain of the activities which are carried on by community centres' – but made no mention of the Leaveners.⁸⁶

The status of *The Maker and the Tool* as a model for union-based cultural activity may have been diminished by its idiosyncratic framing of an argument for workers' control in such uncompromisingly theological terms. Parker described it as 'religious drama seeking to express a Christian attitude to problems of craftsmanship and industry today'.⁸⁷

What it offered owed more to the violent juxtapositional techniques of the metaphysical poets, for example, than the 'simple and direct' didacticism of the pre-war documentary theatre tradition. Thus, its characteristic method was an 'associative' rather than a 'narrative' mode of organization – terms used by Bjorn Sorensen to define the 'poetic'

qualities of Humphrey Jennings's almost surrealistic documentary films of the 1940s.⁸⁸

But Parker was not attempting to establish himself as a 'poet'. His concern was rather to perform for ordinary people – so as to 'set the buggers thinking', in Bill Shreeve's words⁸⁹ – than to impress a conventional arts audience, and to facilitate their use of the form he was developing. He was also driven at least as much by the sheer pleasure of exploring the possibilities of what was an emergent technology at the time as by an aesthetic theory.⁹⁰ Shreeve attests to his enthusiastic inclusion of some of the experimentation with glass slides of leaves and wallpaper which he and fellow projectionist and union activist Bob Etheridge were engaged in at home and (sometimes guiltily) at rehearsals if he felt they added to the mix.⁹¹

By March 1963 the Leaveners, keen to sustain the venture, were proposing the formation of

a committee of representatives of The Leaveners, Trades Council and other interested bodies, whose purpose would be to arrange a Festival on the first anniversary of the 1962 Festival and to work out other ways of furthering the interest stimulated by the first Festival.⁹²

This led to the draft constitution with which I began, which renders a little more concrete the grandiosity of its implied intent. Parker then wrote to Wesker offering a list of topics for 'actuality treatment', another for 'historical treatment', and a proposal for 'a half-hour film' ('drawing on existing material already shot during the rehearsals for *The Maker and the Tool*) for 'trade union branches, etc. . . . on the process of creation of a folk ballad'. This, he believed, could be used in, or even act as a substitute for,

a species of illustrated lecture given, in the first instance, by me – quoting extracts both from the Radio Ballads on tape, from technical sequences in *The Maker and the Tool*, and, where resources permit, live examples of the synthesis possible between singers, actors, dancers, tape, and visuals.⁹³

The point of this Parker describes elsewhere (in one of a number of begging letters seek-

ing support for the venture after the festivals) as a strategy for:

bringing together existing cultural groups – choral societies, dramatic societies, camera clubs, hi-fi tape recording clubs, etc., – into a shared activity in a way that does not have the effect of denying them their individual identity but extends their horizons, and puts their particular skills into a wider personal and social context.⁹⁴

Centre 42 offered 'what help it could',⁹⁵ and in 1965 Wesker was still inviting Parker to outline and budget 'a Theatre Folk Ballad Department for Centre 42'.⁹⁶ But Wesker's energies were increasingly taken up by the attempt to establish the Round House as a base, and Barker moved away, more concerned to 'keep working with the grassroots movement we'd actually started during the festivals'.⁹⁷ Parker and the Leaveners looked elsewhere.

Some of them, Parker included, joined MacColl and Seeger's Critics Group, which was devoted to exploring the performative possibility of folk song, which between 1965 and 1971 made several LP records and staged a number of Christmas revues (under the title of the Festival of Fools) based on the Living Newspapers staged pre-war by Theatre of Action and Theatre Union.⁹⁸

Parker's involvement with the Birmingham and Midland Folk Centre and the Grey Cock Folk Club (founded in 1965) allowed the development, with some of the old Leaveners group and a number of new recruits, of performance pieces using folk song and documentary material. This led to the establishment in 1973 of Banner Theatre, which, through touring performances cemented the relationships with trades unionists formed a decade earlier. He also ran WEA classes, and taught courses for the Wolverhampton Teacher Training College and other educational institutions on the Radio Ballad as a teaching tool.

Following his sacking by the BBC in 1972, Parker threw himself completely into this work. Development of the theatrical aspects of it through the addition of elements drawn from the mummers' plays, commedia dell'arte, and the political theatre techniques of the 1930s preoccupied him until his prema-

ture death at sixty-one in 1980. While much of his work is forgotten, if it was ever known, outside his home city, it is thoroughly documented in the Charles Parker Archive and deserving of attention.

Notes and References

1. 'Draft Constitution', included in Notice of First Annual General Meeting of the Leavers, Beryl Ruehl (Secretary), 14 March 1963, Charles Parker Archives, Birmingham Central Reference Library (CPA), 1/8/8/1.
2. 'Verbatim Theatre: Oral History and Documentary Techniques', *New Theatre Quarterly*, III, No. 12 (1987), p. 319.
3. See, for example, Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 265; Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 109–12; Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 102–7; Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 106.
4. Clive Barker, unpublished typescript, 'General Manager's Report and Recommendations to Management Committee of Centre 42', 26 August 1961, CPA 1/8/7/1, p. 2.
5. Cited in Ruth Hall, 'Wesker: What the Workers Want?', *Topic*, September 1962, p. 12.
6. *New Statesman*, July 1960, cited in Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 18.
7. Barker, op. cit., p. 7.
8. See, for example, 'The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, IX, No. 35 (1979); *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class, and Form* (London: Methuen, 1981).
9. Itzin, op. cit., p. 102–12.
10. Parker, 'Trades Council Festivals', unpublished typescript of publicity material, 1962, CPA 2/90.
11. Geoffrey Reeves, 'The Biggest Aunt Sally of Them All', *Encore*, January/February 1963, p. 15.
12. See, for example, Reeves, op. cit., p. 15; Michael Kustow, 'Centre 42: What Did We Achieve?', *Tribune*, 11 January 1963, p. 7; Arnold Wesker, cited in Laing, op. cit., p. 104.
13. Kershaw, op. cit., p. 118.
14. See, for example, Laing, op. cit., p. 105.
15. See, for example, Peter Ford, 'Centre 42 Goes West', *Guardian*, 12 November 1962: 'Observers at some events . . . might have wondered from the beards and duffel coats if it was not a trades union festival at all but, as one person put it, a get-together of left-wing intellectuals.'
16. Reeves, op. cit., p. 18.
17. Kustow, op. cit., p. 7.
18. 'Arnold Wesker on the Age of Trivia', press clipping held in CPA 1/8/7/2, dated 1962, but no publication details.
19. Frank Coppieters, 'Arnold Wesker's Centre Fortytwo: a Cultural Revolution Betrayed', *Theatre Quarterly*, V, No. 18 (1975), p. 42.
20. Kershaw, op. cit., p. 106.
21. E-mail to David Watt, 15 June 2002.
22. Interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
23. Reeves, op. cit., p. 12.
24. Kustow, op. cit., p. 7.
25. Interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
26. By 1966, Wesker was describing Centre 42's 'image of being a folksy movement' as 'something we have had to try to live down'. Cited in Laing, op. cit., p. 104.
27. John Garforth, 'Arnold Wesker's Mission', *Encore*, No. 43 (May–June 1963), p. 41 ff., cited in Laing, op. cit., p. 105.
28. See Laing, *ibid.*, p. 141–92.
29. 'Memorandum in Support of an Application to the Treasury for Financial Assistance', signed by Lord Macmillan and Lord De La Warre, 6 March 1940. Cited in Robert Hutchinson, *The Politics of the Arts Council* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1982), p. 44.
30. Hutchinson, *ibid.*, p. 55.
31. *The Arts in Great Britain: the Seventh Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1951–2*, p. 22–3, cited in Hutchinson, *ibid.*, p. 49.
32. Itzin, op. cit., p. 109–12.
33. See Dave Rogers, 'Banner Theatre', *Theatre Ireland*, No. 28, (1992), p. 21; Anna Seymour, 'Culture and Political Change: British Radical Theatre in Recent History', *Theatre Research International*, XXI, No. 1 (1996), p. 8–16; Alan Filewod and David Watt, *Workers Playtime: Theatre and the Labour Movement in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom 1970–1997* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001), p. 83–127.
34. 'The Pervasiveness of the Commonplace: the Historian and Amateur Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, XXVI, No. 3 (2001), p. 233–42.
35. Topic have recently released all eight of the MacColl/Seeger/Parker Radio Ballads on CD, although two more (*The Jewellery*, about jewellery craftsmen in Birmingham; and *A Cry from the Cut*, about the Midland canal communities), made with Ian Campbell on a fraction of the budgets of these, have sunk into obscurity.
36. At least not in 1970, although Derek Paget cites him as at least paying the appropriate tribute to the Radio Ballads in 1985: see Paget, op. cit., p. 318, in which he refers to the underestimation of the influence of the Radio Ballads and of the documentary film of the 1930s and 1940s on the development of documentary theatre.
37. Cheeseman, 'Introduction', *The Knotty* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. xi.
38. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
39. See Jim Lagden, 'Theatre in the Market Place', *Theatre Quarterly*, I, No. 1 (1970), p. 83.
40. John Lane and Peter Burton, *New Directions: Ways of Advance for the Amateur Theatre* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1970), p. 22.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 65–73.
42. This sort of work was particularly associated with BBC Radio Manchester under Archie Harding in the 1930s. See Paddy Scannell, 'The Stuff of Radio: Developments in Radio Features and Documentary Before the War', in John Corner, ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 1–26, for a full account.
43. Paget, op. cit., p. 317–36.
44. See, for example, Dave Harker, *Fakesong* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). For accounts of the Second British Folk Revival, see also Niall MacKinnon, *The British Folk Scene*

- (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); Mike Brocken, *The British Folk Revival* (web.ukonline.co.uk/mustrad/articles/broc_ndx.htm), 1998.
45. Interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
 46. Parker, 'Dog in the Manger – and After', 8 January 1962, CPA 1/8/8/3.
 47. Parker says 1959 in 'Dog in the Manger – and After', but the draft script is dated 1960. The performance may have been repeated.
 48. Initially in the posthumously published work by R. J. E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), and soon afterwards in E. K. Chambers, *The English Folk Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). Both of these works were then republished in the late 1960s or early 1970s, and further interest is indicated by the publication of Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays* (London: Routledge, 1971).
 49. Glynne Wickham, 'Introduction: Trends in International Drama Research', in Eckehard Simon, ed., *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 5.
 50. See John R. Elliott Jr., *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
 51. *The Medieval Theatre in the Round* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).
 52. See Kershaw, op. cit., p. 113–17, for an account of this project.
 53. 'Dog in the Manger – and After', p. 2.
 54. Ibid., p. 1.
 55. Ibid., p. 2.
 56. Interview with David Watt, 24 May 2000.
 57. E-mail to David Watt, 15 June 2002.
 58. 'Dog in the Manger – and After', p. 2.
 59. Parker, letter to D. G. G. Lawrence, Secretary to the Committee on Broadcasting, 25 November 1960, CPA 1/8/8/1.
 60. Laterna Magika has recently been one of the subjects of Catherine Diamond's 'Prague Summer: Encounters with a Third Kind of Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly*, XVII, No. 67 (2001), p. 230–4.
 61. 'Dog in the Manger – and After', p. 4. It is difficult to establish what Parker might have known of the pre-war 'Griersonian' documentary film tradition – see Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) – or, in particular, the work of Humphrey Jennings in the 1940s – see Mary-Lou Jennings, ed., *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (London: British Film Institute, 1982) – which his own work perhaps most resembles, but Jennings's work was certainly on the agenda at the time, following Lindsay Anderson's 'Only Connect: Some Aspects of the Work of Humphrey Jennings', in *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1954). Clearly, John Grierson's famous description of documentary film as 'the creative treatment of actuality' left its mark.
 62. 'Dog in the Manger – and After', p. 3.
 63. Ibid., p. 4.
 64. Ibid.
 65. Ibid., p. 5.
 66. Parker, letter to D. G. G. Lawrence, 25 November 1960, CPA 1/8/8/1.
 67. Parker, letter to W. Byng Kenrick, 16 December 1960, CPA 1/8/8/1.
 68. Parker to Clive Barker, 2 September 1961, CPA 1/8/7/1.
 69. 'Premises', CPA 1/8/8/3.
 70. Interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
 71. CPA 2/90/40.
 72. CPA 2/90/5.
 73. The minutes of a meeting between Birmingham Trades Council delegates and Barker and Wesker indicate that these consultations may not have led very far. They report that 'many suggestions' were made but ultimately that 'this be left in the hands of Mr Charles Parker' (Minutes, 19 April 1962, Birmingham Trade Council Festival Committee file, Birmingham Central Reference Library). I am indebted to Paul Foot for drawing my attention to this file.
 74. Note in CPA 2/90/1.
 75. The Archive includes a file of 122 pages of interview transcriptions (CPA 2/9/40).
 76. Letter to Whannell, n.d., CPA 2/90/14.
 77. Parker to McGinn, 15 August 1962, CPA 2/90/15.
 78. Parker to Handle, 9 July 1962, CPA 2/90/16.
 79. *The Maker and the Tool*, CPA 2/90/7 p. 1. All further citations from this text.
 80. Interview with David Watt, 30 May 2000. One of the others was Bob Etheridge, who, with Shreeve, went on to work with Banner Theatre for many years.
 81. Letter to Sir Albert Bradbeer (Alderman), 17 January 1963, CPA 1/8/8/2.
 82. Reeves, op. cit., p. 15.
 83. Interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
 84. 'W. H. B.', *Birmingham Post*, 24 October 1962.
 85. Frank Stanley, *Marxism Today*, March 1963, p. 14–15.
 86. Letter to Michael Henshaw, Secretary, Centre 42, 10 July 1963 (Birmingham Trade Council Festival Committee file, Birmingham Central Reference Library).
 87. Memo to C. M. R., 24 January 1962, CPA 1/8/7/1.
 88. Sorensen, 'The Documentary Aesthetics of Humphrey Jennings', in Corner, ed., op. cit., p. 47–63. Jennings's work has recently been given further currency for contemporary theatre practitioners by Alan Read in *Theatre and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 69–85.
 89. Interview with David Watt, 30 May 2000.
 90. CPA holds a transcript of a 1983 interview by Gary Bryson with the documentary film- and television-maker Philip Donellan, who started his career in radio with Parker in Birmingham and remained a close associate, in which he indicates an atmosphere of genuine playfulness with the new technologies at the time.
 91. Interview with David Watt, 30 May 2000.
 92. 'Resolution from Jim Dutton', included in Notice of First Annual General Meeting of the Leavers, Beryl Ruehl (Secretary), 14 March 1963, CPA 1/8/8/1.
 93. Letter to Arnold Wesker, 30 April 1963, CPA 1/8/8/1.
 94. Letter to Sir Albert Bradbeer (Alderman), 17 January 1963, CPA 1/8/8/1.
 95. Barker, interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
 96. Letter from Wesker, 11 June 1965, CPA 2/90/23.
 97. Interview with David Watt, 18 May 2000.
 98. These, like Parker's work, were offered as possible forms for the amateur theatre in Lane and Burton, op. cit., p. 57–64.