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978-0-521-55456-5 - The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland)

Maria DiCenzo

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This is the first book to examine one of the most influential modern theatre companies, 7:84 (Scotland), under the directorship of John McGrath. 7:84 (Scotland) has been a vital contributor to the place and importance of alternative theatre on the modern British stage and DiCenzo explores not only the development of this company but also the growth of popular theatre in general within the last twenty years. DiCenzo also offers a new methodology for analysing records and materials found in theatre company archives and illustrates the many issues inherent in running a theatre company, including venues, practitioners and the politics of funding. The book includes valuable primary source material and informative production photographs and company posters.

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For Pasqualina  
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## Foreword

The nineteen-sixties and seventies saw most of the best creative minds of my generation, the new generation, in open revolt against everything we considered 'bourgeois'. Our critical eye roved with corruscating gaze from the authoritarian complacency of the academic dead-heads, over the pusillanimous lethargy of governments of left and right, institutionalizing power-structures that robbed, cheated and made wage-slaves of the mass of the population of the West – the people – then brain-washed them into acceptance, all the way to the yawningly obtuse and venal heirs of Stalin who silenced and cowed the population of the East.

Some of us could see that as technology turned a labour-intensive world into a capital-intensive world, these power-structures would become more and more powerful and leave the masses even poorer, with even less power to resist. And they were right.

Others saw these power-structures demanding a suffocating, servile intellectual and artistic climate, in which not only dissent but also the imagination would be squashed into conformity. And they were right too.

Still others saw the whole paraphernalia of the arts, religion, patriarchy, institutionalized culture, psychiatry, historiography and educational practice as they then existed as inimical to the proper development of humanity and the present and future happiness of the psyche. And they were right too.

It was little wonder then that we dismissed the conventional notions of art as 'immortal', as existing outside time, place and class, as so much self-serving hogwash. I pinned to my wall one of my maxims about the tragi-comic vision of 'the bourgeois artist so

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preoccupied with looking over his shoulder to future immortality that he can't see what's going on in front of his nose'. We never kept records. In alternative theatre, very few plays were published, archives not kept, as we moved on to the next work. Everybody knows, of course, that we lost nearly all our struggles.

The world had to become a safer place for the multi-nationals, and the New World Order was born – a Caesarian birth, to be sure; it effortlessly overwhelmed our disorganized desire for less organization, our powerless resolve to give power to the imagination, our elitist demands for humans regardless of gender, race or class, to be equal, for co-operation to replace competition, our reckless campaigns to safeguard the future of the planet, our unsoldierly need to control the military, our utopian belief in loving and creating replacing greed and standardization.

In some quarters, pompous with hindsight, it is fashionable to claim, with some scorn, that our failures were somehow self-induced. This is to disregard the weight and intricacy of the operation mounted against us, details of which are only starting to come to light.

Others say we deserved to lose, dismissing our notions as dangerous, subversively playing into the hands of, if not paid for by, the thugs in Moscow. This is to disregard the vehemence with which Stalinism in all its forms, particularly the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, was denounced and reviled. It is the prejudice of the right (also sometimes alarmingly voiced by former comrades and colleagues) – mindless and mendacious.

As time goes by, perhaps other generations will need a more objective scrutiny of our failings and our hopes. As we consciously left very few traces of our activities, particularly our joys and successes, perhaps now is a good time to scoop up the raw material, before the memory of the participants becomes too selective, too rosy, too bilious. So I am grateful for this look at a very tiny, peripheral part of that era, carried out without axe-grinding or malice, but with a healthy scepticism and considerable scholarship. And I hope future generations will find something of interest in this and other studies like it, records of the vanishing possibilities of hope, which, somehow, never completely vanishes.

John McGrath

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